

Religious Congregations and Civic Resources

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Religious Congregations and Civic Resources

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Abstract

Much has been said recently about the decline in both political and non-political civic participation in the United States. Many American religious congregations, however, continue to stand strong as voluntary associations connecting people with the political and civic life in our country. This paper explains the role that religious congregations can play as promoters of civic engagement. Specifically, it describes the mechanisms by which religious congregations can provide what I call civic resources to their members, resources members utilize to participate in other forms of civic activity outside of their congregation.

These resources can be broken down into three main categories. *Civic skills* are the communication and organizational abilities that an individual can draw upon to make participation more effective. Congregations provide opportunities for members to gain experience using such skills when becoming involved in church governance or in organizing church committees to take on special tasks or put on special events. *Social Infrastructure* captures the value of the social networks and organizational resources available to members of a congregation. The tight-knit social community within a church serves as an effective network to spread relevant information or recruit volunteers for any collective activity. Finally, there are a number of *psychological resources* a congregation can bring to bear on an individual. Oftentimes the religious teachings of congregations encourage members to adopt civic-minded values and attitudes that serve as a strong motivation to participate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| I. Introduction: The Problem We Face..... | 3 |
| II. Empirical Analysis: A Link Between Religious Involvement and Civic Engagement?..... | 9 |
| <i>Literature Review</i> | 10 |
| <i>A Note on Claims of Causation</i> | 13 |
| <i>Results</i> | 16 |
| III. A Theory of Engagement: Religion as a Civic Resource..... | 20 |
| <i>Solving the Problems of Collective Action and Democratic Citizenship</i> | 21 |
| <i>Civic Skills</i> | 26 |
| <i>Social Infrastructure</i> | 32 |
| <i>Psychological Resources: The Role of Attitudes and Values</i> | 37 |
| <i>Section Summary</i> | 46 |
| IV. Application: Three Case Studies in How Congregations Relate to Civic Engagement..... | 47 |
| <i>Case Study 1: Professionalized Service Opportunities in a “Mega-Church.”</i> | 49 |
| <i>Case Study 2: The Fellowship- or Membership-Based Group</i> | 51 |
| <i>Case Study 3: The Politicized Congregational Group</i> | 57 |
| V. Concluding Matter..... | 61 |
| Appendix A: Methodology for Empirical Analysis..... | 63 |
| Appendix B: Information about the Interviews and My Questionnaire..... | 66 |
| Citation Index..... | 72 |

I. Introduction: The Problem We Face

Though the high level of excitement over the recent presidential election is an encouraging sign, there is still startling evidence that Americans are losing interest in the political and civic life in our country. Much has been said about Americans' growing disaffection and disengagement with politics, and particular emphasis has been placed on low voter turnout and the political apathy that has seemed to grip the country. But American citizens are also making less effort to "get out of the home" to participate in community groups like the League of Women Voters, Parent-Teacher Associations, church groups, the Boy Scouts, and even bowling leagues. Today many people only "participate" by writing a check to their favorite large national interest group with headquarters in some far away place. Something as low-commitment as reading an occasional newsletter from the Sierra Club or the National Rifle Association is the only way a vast majority of Americans get involved (Putnam, 2000).

The resulting loss of "social capital"—a broad term reflecting the inherent value and benefits of strong socio-political networks, community interaction, and social trust—is bad for individual well-being, bad for the economy, and most importantly, bad for our democracy (Putnam, 1993). Our democracy is a political system that relies upon citizens' active participation in and deliberation about public matters. An effective government in such a system requires the strong interest, attention, and involvement of "we the people." An America that remains on the path of civic *disengagement* is an America with a decaying democracy and a failing government.

Yet there are a few forces fighting against the rising tide of apathy and disengagement in this country. Among the most important of these, and particularly influential in the United States, are religious congregations. Robert Wuthnow, a leading expert on the interaction

between American religion and public life, writes that “religion contributes positively to the functioning of American democracy by encouraging civic involvement” (Wuthnow, 2008). Moreover, as other civic organizations that contribute to the building of social capital seem to be withering away, Wuthnow notes that “religious congregations are one of the few voluntary associations that have remained relatively stable in recent decades,” maintaining its powerful force encouraging engagement with public life in the United States.

What I hope to understand is the role that religious congregations can play as promoters of civic engagement. Specifically, I want to describe the mechanisms by which religious congregations—which are alike to other types of voluntary associations in many ways, set apart mainly by their unique organizational purposes to enrich the spiritual lives of their members and to give guidance to their members on the proper way to live—can provide what I call civic resources to their members, resources members utilize to participate in other forms of civic activity outside of their congregation.

As we will see later, the civic resources that congregations can provide are broken down into three main categories. *Civic skills* are the communication and organizational abilities that an individual can draw upon to make participation more effective. Congregations provide opportunities for members to gain experience using such skills when becoming involved in church governance or in organizing church committees to take on special tasks or put on special events. *Social Infrastructure* captures the value of the social networks and organizational resources available to members of a congregation. The tight-knit social community within a church serves as an effective network to spread relevant information or recruit volunteers for any collective activity. Finally, there are a number of *psychological resources* a congregation can bring to bear on an individual. Oftentimes the religious teachings of congregations encourage

members to adopt civic-minded values and attitudes that serve as a strong motivation to participate.

We will go about discussing the mechanisms by which congregations can provide these resources to their members in three distinct sections. First, I hope to establish empirically that membership in a congregation does indeed have a positive effect on civic participation. If the relationship between religion and civic engagement was not demonstrable empirically, this paper would be nothing more than a moot point. However, through statistical analysis in Section II of this paper, I show that, since those who are involved in religious life tend to participate more in civic life, there must be some mechanisms working by which congregations encourage their members to participate in the wider community. Section III then seeks to describe, in a general manner, what these mechanisms are and discuss further the civic resources they spread. It is here that I describe the ways in which congregations can spread the resources of civic skills, social infrastructure, and psychological resources to their members. Finally, Section IV provides three case studies that serve as practical examples of how congregations link their members with civic resources. Even among those congregations that promote participation in the community, some do better than others at linking their members to civic resources, the resources that create and support truly active and engaged citizens. I argue that this is a result of differences in organization and culture among congregations.

I want to be very clear about one puzzle that I will not be addressing in this paper, mainly because the research I completed could not provide a full and satisfactory answer to it. Some religious congregations in the world are strongly supportive of democracy—they teach the values of democratic citizenship, provide opportunities to practice civic skills, and/or have active exchange of ideas and recruitment among members. However, it is quite obvious that there are

many religious congregations that are in fact very anti-democratic—they preach separation from (or even violence towards) a sinful world outside of the sanctuary of their congregation, and/or they are quite hierarchical in nature, allowing no input or involvement from members. Religion in many cases can be a support for democracy; perhaps in just as many cases today it can be a strong hindrance. We can of course think of Tocqueville's image of churches in America as places where democracy is practiced among neighbors in the daily life of a local community. But we can come up with just as many images of radical religious groups in Saudi Arabia and Iran of today, and even the Christian Church of long ago responsible for the Crusades and the Inquisition, that mostly stifle and oppress and discourage democracy. There are many more instances in our history, unfortunately, where religion has bred sectarianism, intolerance, the repression of women, the stifling of new ways of thinking, and social conflict. There are, moreover, plenty of instances right here in America today where separation from and suspicion of the wider American community is preached and practiced, particularly among fundamentalist religious congregations.

What this paper will not address is why this is so: why some congregations promote democracy and civic engagement while others work to dismantle it. What determines whether a religious congregation will be a strong ally to further democratic citizenship? At another time with further research—particularly with a much larger and more diverse sample of interviews, a better understanding of religious history of a wide variety of sects and religions, and more detailed statistical data—I can envision coming to a systematic explanation for this. But for now I must speculate that some congregations choose to be supportive of democratic citizenship while others are quite anti-democratic because of a complex combination of denominational differences, differences in the cultural environment of a community around a congregation, the

quirks of individual leadership within a congregation, and religious and cultural history. Disentangling this complex web must be saved for another paper at another time. Again to reiterate the question I *am* asking in light of this point: for those congregations that *do* choose to have active and democratic participation in their communities, I am trying to better understand the mechanisms by which they can link their members with the civic resources that promote civic engagement.¹

To answer this question I conducted a thorough review of the available secondary literature and conducted 25 interviews of my own to ground my developed theory in practical, real life situations. The interview subjects were leaders and activists from churches and synagogues in Minneapolis and Boston that had clear records of activity and engagement within the communities around them. Most of those who I interviewed were paid staff of their congregations, but a good number were involved as volunteers. It must be noted that, because of the way I selected individuals for interview, the sample is not in any way representative of the population of American congregations as a whole. Again, this was intentional: I am focusing on understanding particular dynamics within congregations that are actively engaged with their surrounding communities, *not* in comprehensively understanding American congregations as a whole. Within the parameters I had set (congregations with a clear engaged relationship with the communities around them) I worked very diligently to get a diverse array of viewpoints—getting different denominations within different kinds of neighborhoods with different kinds of political views. I succeeded for the most part in this, though, simply because of the demographics of the Boston area, there is an overrepresentation in the sample of progressive mainline Protestant churches. I actually reached out to congregations in the Minneapolis area mostly because I was having a difficult time finding and/or getting responses from more “conservative” or

¹ I am strongly indebted to Professor Kay Schlozman for pointing out the need to be more clear on this point.

“evangelical” congregations in Boston. A more detailed description of my interview subjects and their congregations can be found in Appendix B at the end of this paper.

A final point I want to make before embarking on our journey is about the kinds of statements I am making in this paper. This discussion is intended to be suggestive in nature rather than wholly conclusive. The sample size of religious activists that I interviewed is far too small and unrepresentative of the whole population of religious believers in America to make any exhaustive statements about American religion as a whole. My project is this: here are some interesting things I found when talking to real people about their real community commitments that relate to much of the literature on civic engagement. Much of what I have witnessed and heard in my time spent at these congregations would appear to confirm and thus lend support to the secondary literature available on the topic. The interviews not only helped me to understand concretely many of the points scholars were making, but they also led to a few insights and modifications I could make to refine the model presented by the secondary literature. I believe that the theory of engagement I present in section III and exemplify in section IV begins the project of expanding upon existing models, filling in a few gaps, and clarifying points otherwise left incomplete in the existing literature (compare the two-pronged model presented in Harris [1994] and the civic voluntarism model in Verba, Schlozman, Brady [1995]).

Again I’ll reiterate where we are going from here. Section II presents an empirical analysis that shows evidence that participation in one’s church increases one’s tendency to participate in a wide array of both political and non-political forms of civic activity. Section III presents my main theory of engagement, and explains the mechanisms by which congregations serve to provide these civic resources to their members. Section IV furthers the project of Section III by providing case studies, real life examples, of how congregations work to

encourage civic engagement, and argues that institutional differences within the congregations lead to different results for engagement.

II. Empirical Analysis: A Link Between Religious Involvement and Civic Engagement?

Before we can begin any discussion on *how* religious involvement encourages civic engagement, we have to establish that there is an empirically-observable connection between the two. Can we clearly see that religion is an aid to both non-political and political forms of civic engagement? In other words, is American religion a resource for American civil society? The answer, as we will see, is yes.

Solely from statistical analysis, one cannot tell exactly *how* religion encourages civic engagement—the available numbers simply don't say what the “pupils” learn in these “great schools.” However, after examining data from the 1975-1998 DDB Needham Life Style Surveys, and employing the techniques of OLS regression and probit analysis, we find evidence that those who participate in their churches also participate more frequently in both the political and non-political civic life of their communities. Though the magnitude of religion's effect on civic participation is not as large as for variables such as education and income that represent socioeconomic status (which is, typically, proclaimed the most important resource for participation), religion quite clearly plays a significant and positive role. Moreover, considering the sheer number of Americans touched by religion—by one estimation there are over 330,000 religious congregations in the US (Hadaway and Long-Marler 2005) and by another 33 percent of Americans attend worship once per week (Brooks 2008, 550)—and the egalitarian nature of its distribution—grasping the attention of people of all walks of life, the rich and the poor, whites and minorities, citizens and foreigners (“The domain of equal access to opportunities to learn

civic skills is the church;” Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995, 320)—the effect takes on especially considerable importance. Religion might make only a modest contribution to each individual, but when taken in the aggregate it adds up to quite a formidable influence.

Literature Review. In addition to my own analysis which I will present later, there is considerable support for this claim in the available secondary literature. One observation clearly established among scholars is that participation in a religious institution is highly associated with turnout for elections—those that attend religious services on a regular basis are more likely to vote than those who do not make this commitment (Olsen 1972; Macaluso & Wanat 1979; Strate, et al 1989). Harris (1994), using data from the 1987 General Social Survey (GSS), even finds that church attendance has a greater association with voting behavior than a number of socioeconomic factors typically used to explain turnout, including education, income, and race.

A number of analysts have found in the data a link between religious involvement and forms of political participation that go beyond voting—attending a public meeting, volunteering time for a political campaign, or contacting a public official, for example—but the evidence is a little more hazy and a little less consistent. Peterson, in a multiple regression analysis, finds numbers to “suggest that politicization remains somewhat higher among whites with greater church involvement.... Greater involvement in church goes with more political knowledge and higher levels of overall political participation and communal politics.” However, he finds that “among blacks, [greater church involvement] remains only mildly related to greater overall political participation and voting turnout” (1992, 133). Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, 337), as well as Jones-Correa and Leal (2001), find a clear positive relationship between church

attendance and overall political activity, but the effect appears to be only mild when compared to the effects of socioeconomic status variables.

Harris (1994) is most clear on this topic. Instead of considering “religion” as a monolithic variable as many other analysts do, he breaks it down into three components: personal religiosity (a composite measure of one’s “closeness to God,” frequency of prayer, and level of commitment to one’s particular denomination), church attendance (a measure of frequency of attendance at religious services), and extra-liturgical church activism (a measure of involvement in church groups or activities such as religious education, church governance, or volunteer service activities).

His choice to break religion down in this manner allows us to see the unique relationship each component has to civic engagement. While personal religiosity, in its direct relationship, was slightly *negatively* related to voting frequency and participation in community collective action, it ultimately serves to *promote* these forms of participation *indirectly* through its ability to promote interest in politics and a sense of political efficacy—important psychological resources for political action. Mere attendance at services, he shows, does not in itself promote involvement in collective action outside of the church, but weekly attendance *does* in itself have a strongly positive effect on voting frequency, as we discussed above. Finally, church activism has the largest impact on civic engagement. Stepping beyond the liturgy and getting involved in the organizational life within a church has both direct and indirect effects on membership in secular organizations outside of the church, participation in collective action to solve community problems, knowledge of political affairs, and frequency of voting. He concludes that while “religion involves multidimensional components with different effects on different modes of action,” ultimately his evidence supports his claim that “religion performs as a resource for

political action...Both organizationally and psychologically, religious beliefs and practices promote political involvement” (1994, 62).

Finally, more needs to be said than what is currently available about the effect of religious involvement on the vast array of non-political forms of civic engagement. It is beyond doubt that “religious behavior is the single biggest predictor of American charity”: religious people give more money and volunteer more time than the purely secular (Brooks 2008, 550). But few conclusions have been drawn about other forms of non-political community participation. Lazerwitz (1962) points out that those who frequently attend church are members of more organizations than those who do not, but later argues that church attendance and organizational membership are both determined by a third factor: socioeconomic status. Smidt makes a stronger case for a direct link, finding that “even when controls were introduced for education, age, race, gender, region, and social trust, it is clear that both church attendance and religious tradition have an independent impact upon respondents’ reported levels of civic engagement” (1999, 191). In his sample, those who attended church and who identified strongly with their faith held more memberships in various types of voluntary associations than those who were not religious. Surprisingly, he finds that the impact of church attendance exceeds the impact of education on civic engagement (1999, 189).

Putnam is most vocal on this subject. He argues:

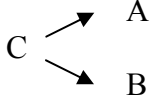
Regular worshipers and people who say that religion is very important to them are much more likely than other people to visit friends, to entertain at home, to attend club meetings, and to belong to sports groups; professional and academic societies; school service groups; youth groups; service clubs; hobby or garden clubs; literary, art, discussion, and study groups; school fraternities and sororities; farm organizations; political clubs; nationality groups; and other miscellaneous groups...In [another] survey...it was membership in religious groups that was most closely associated with other forms of civic involvement (2000, 66-67).

These are strong claims that would certainly help the case for a link, but unfortunately he cites only “author’s calculations” from various sources of data—including the General Social Survey,

the DDB Needham Life Style Surveys, National Election Studies, and Roper Social and Political Trends surveys—so we cannot be sure how he got his conclusions or to what magnitude religious involvement mattered for these other forms of civic engagement. To root out the merit of his conclusions, I will be, in effect, reproducing Putnam’s data analysis from the DDB Needham Surveys, to which analysis we now turn.

A Note on Claims of Causation: Before I proceed with my own statistical analysis, I want to make a few comments about the kinds of conclusions I can draw from my data. As we will see below, my data shows a clear, positive, and statistically significant relationship between measures of religious involvement and measures of civic participation. This association between variables alone, however, does not necessarily imply *causation*. As we can see from Table 1, there are many possible explanations for this association between variables, and in some of these cases it is not correct to say that the first variable *causes* the second variable.

Table 1: Possible Explanations for Association Between Variables

| Symbolic Representation | Explanation for Correlation |
|---|---|
| A → B | <i>Direct Causation.</i> A causes B, that is, because of the presence of A we have B. Example: going to church increases the likelihood of voting in elections. |
| A ← B | <i>Reverse Causation.</i> B causes A, that is, because of the presence of B we have A. Example: voting in an election increases the likelihood of going to church |
| A ↔ B | <i>Joint Causation.</i> A and B both mutually reinforce each other. Example: Going to church increases likelihood of voting and higher voting participation increases church attendance |
|  | <i>Antecedent Variable.</i> Some third variable C is a cause of both A and B. Example: punctuality increases likelihood both of attending church and showing up to the polls. |
| A → X → B | <i>Intervening Variable.</i> A is a cause of X, and it is X that causes B. Example: going to church increases a sense of civic duty which in turn increases the likelihood of voting |

When an association between variables is observed, it is appropriate to say that the presence of the first results in an increase in the second (*A causes B*) if we can find evidence of either direct causation (the first row in the table above) or causation via some intervening variable (the last row in the table above). That is, only if we can somehow show that religious participation in itself directly increases civic engagement (a relationship of *direct causation*) or that religious participation increases some factors that lead to civic engagement (causation via an *intervening variable*) can we appropriately say that religious participation *causes* civic engagement. In any other case the claim that A causes B is said to be spurious.

In our case, one spurious relationship we should be particularly careful to look for is the problem of a “selection effect” or a “self-selection bias”. For example, it is possible that something happens in church such that those that attend learn something or gain something that encourages them to vote more. This would be a causal relationship. However, it is also possible that there is something different about the *kind* of people who go to church regularly. Perhaps they are better at getting into routines and more organized (as shown by the fact that they go to worship at least every other week) and it is this personality trait (punctuality), and not anything they’ve gained in church, that leads them to vote more often than those who do not attend church regularly. This is an example of a “selection bias,” because there are problems in the selection of the sample such that you cannot know or control for all of the relevant information. It is an example of an *antecedent variable* as shown in row four of Table 1: some other factor causes both church attendance *and* voting, and an association between the two appears.

The question raised about a possible selection bias for church attendance is very valid. We know from their commitment to membership that congregation “members are *already* ‘joiners,’” and this personal characteristic may be what causes church members to participate in

their wider communities (Leege 1988, 712). We should be especially on the lookout for selection biases in this case, and we will see below after examining the results that there are a few likely cases of association via “selection bias” in my results.

There are statistical tools that allow scholars to test empirically for the direction of causation and filter out potential selection biases. A few of the analysts that I cited above utilize such tools to show mathematically a relationship of causation between religion and civic engagement. Unfortunately such tools are currently too advanced to be within my grasp, so I will not be able to prove anything mathematically with my data at this point. Instead, I will make a series of theoretical arguments later in this paper to (in my opinion strongly) support the following claim: that the observed association between religious involvement and civic engagement is in fact due to indirect causation via intervening variables. Church attendance, religiosity, and church organizational involvement cause individuals to gain access to civic skills, social infrastructure, and psychological resources, all of which can be said to cause civic engagement because they facilitate such activity. For now, we will turn to my empirical results that show an association between religious involvement and civic engagement.

Table 2: The effect of regular church attendance and religiosity on various forms of civic engagement and activity

| DEPENDENT VARIABLE | CHURCH ATTENDANCE BETA VALUE | RELIGIOSITY BETA VALUE | EDUCATION BETA VALUE | NO. OBS. |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Political/Civic Activity | | | | |
| Community Project | ***.115 | ***.031 | ***.130 | 48,179 |
| Letter to the Editor | .002 | .011 | ***.053 | 41,057 |
| ^a Contact Public Official | *.041 | *.041 | **0.097 | 3,134 |
| [§] Registered Voter | ***.050 | ***.030 | ***.076 | 6,606 |
| Volunteer | ***.224 | ***.037 | ***.143 | 48,101 |
| Club Meeting | ***.144 | ***.018 | ***.167 | 48,264 |
| Contribute to Env Org | -.041 | *.045 | .067 | 2,970 |
| Attend Public Lecture | ***.086 | ***.028 | ***.186 | 48,179 |
| ^{ab} Gave a Speech | ***.110 | NV | ***.233 | 8,919 |
| [§] Donated Blood | ***.047 | .007 | .013 | 14,004 |
| | | | | |
| Other Political | | | | |
| ^a Read Newspaper | *.045 | -.023 | ***.212 | 3,126 |
| [§] Political Efficacy | .003 | ***.023 | ***.138 | 48,316 |
| [§] Interest in Politics | ***-.025 | ***.095 | ***.292 | 48,496 |
| | | | | |
| Social/Leisure Activity | | | | |
| Dinner Party | ***.080 | -.001 | ***.142 | 48,400 |
| Entertain Friends | ***.057 | .008 | ***.080 | 48,121 |
| Sent Greeting Card | ***.078 | ***.038 | ***.102 | 42,040 |
| Play on Sports Team | ***.054 | .007 | *.089 | 6,108 |
| ^{ab} Visit Relatives | ***.114 | NV | ***-.079 | 8,894 |
| [§] Eat Family Dinner | ***.046 | ***.044 | ***.049 | 48,049 |
| | | | | |

* = Significant at .05, ** = Significant at .01, *** = Significant at .001

NOTE: Unless otherwise noted, all equations controlled for age, education level, income level, race, sex, marital and parental status, and employment status. All beta values are standardized.

a = Income information not available

b = Race information not available

§ = Dependent variable was in the form of a binary variable (yes/no) and thus probit analysis was used in place of OLS.

Results. Table 2 shows the results of OLS and probit analysis on the DDB Needham Life Style Surveys data. A detailed methodology for these tests can be found in Appendix A. As we can see from the table, church attendance is strongly associated with civic engagement, as it has a statistically significant and positive effect on 15 out of the 19 measures of engagement.

Personal religiosity, whether or not the respondent believed religion was important in their lives, was a less powerful predictor of civic engagement, but still made modest and statistically significant contributions in 11 of the 19 engagement measures.

Comparing our two measures of religion to education, represented in the table above by a variable measuring the effects of gaining a college degree, confirms our hypothesis—that although religion is associated with civic engagement, the association is still somewhat modest when compared to the consistently strong association between civic engagement and socioeconomic status. We can see, however, that there are a number of variables for which the relationship with religion is nearly as strong as the relationship with education. See for example working on a community project, being registered to vote, attending club meetings, playing on sports teams, and regularly eating dinner as a family. Volunteering, donating blood, and visiting relatives are actually more strongly associated with church attendance than with education.

Not surprisingly, church attendance had a relatively stronger association with building community through social and leisure activities than it did in encouraging political involvement. For such non-political civic activities, church attendance is very nearly as strong, and in a few cases stronger, of a predictor as education in the categories I was able to test.

We can confirm, furthermore, many of the claims we find in the secondary literature. As expected, church attendance had a clear positive relationship to voting participation—those that attended church regularly tended to be registered to vote more often (and by far the strongest predictor of voting behavior is being registered to vote). In our analysis, however, church attendance was not a stronger predictor for voting than education, as Harris had suggested.

As a few of our authors claimed, religion is in fact an aid to political participation that goes beyond voting, but the effect is somewhat mild when compared to education. Writing a

letter to an editor, contributing to environmental organizations, and having a sense of political efficacy all seem at best weakly affected by either attendance at church or personal religiosity. I do find evidence to support Harris' claim that religiosity does impact the psychological characteristic of interest in politics, but with my data find only a weak relationship between personal religiosity and a sense of political efficacy.

It is of note as well that we see such a strong relationship between our religion variables and frequency of volunteering among respondents. As Brooks argued, volunteering is actually more strongly predicted by religion than by "secular" variables such as socioeconomic status. Those that attended church regularly were more likely to volunteer regularly than those who are simply highly educated.

Finally, we do find evidence to support Putnam's claim—regular worshipers and those who say that religion is important to them do in fact participate more in many different types of civic activity. Though we cannot yet make any claims here with the numbers we have available about *why* this is so, it is at least clear at this stage that there is something about religious involvement that encourages civic engagement.

One shortfall of the available data is that it does not allow us, as Harris did, to measure the particular effects of participation in the organizational life of the church—that is, it does not allow us to measure the specific effect of getting involved in church governance, support groups, religious education, fellowship groups, and more. However, the Surveys asked only two questions of the respondents (how often they attended worship, and whether or not religion was an important part in their life), neither of which measured the effect of church organizational involvement. Some of this "organizational involvement" effect is undoubtedly contained in the variable measuring church attendance, for we can assume that a sizeable majority of those who

attend worship services 25 or more times a year also get involved in their churches beyond the liturgy. This, most likely, explains why church attendance appears to be much more powerful than my other measure of religious involvement, personal religiosity. Yet it is still important to remember that, as Harris argued, personal religiosity is the least powerful of the means by which religion aids civic engagement.

This shortfall in the data is indeed somewhat damaging. It is through the organizational life of the church, a few key scholars argue, that religion makes its greatest contribution towards encouraging civic engagement (Verba, Schlozman, Brady 1995; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001). We will discuss the reasons why this is so at a later time. In any future data analysis, I would like to find a way to include this important factor.

Another potential shortfall is the problem of self-selection bias that we mentioned above. It is not entirely convincing, for example, to say that attending church services *causes* families to eat dinner together. It is more likely that the kind of people who eat dinner together as families are also the kind of people who go to church. While there is an association between church attendance and family dinner, it is likely that these are both caused by some antecedent variable, some personality trait (adherence to tradition family lifestyles, for example) within individuals. A similar argument could be made with respect to sending greeting cards or visiting relatives—the kind of people that send greeting cards or visit their relatives regularly are also the kind of people that tend to attend worship regularly. It is not correct to say in these cases that church attendance or religiosity *causes* individuals to engage in these activities.

For the remaining measures of civic engagement, however, I would argue that church attendance and religiosity *cause* (albeit indirectly) participation in civic, political, and social activity. For some of the social and leisure activities, going to a dinner party or playing on a

sports team for example, religious involvement cause these activities because in congregations people are connected with vast social networks of friends that would recruit them for such activity. For the civic and political activities in Table 2, I would argue that church attendance and religiosity cause such activity because they provide the civic skills, social infrastructure, and psychological resources that facilitate such activity for individuals. The remainder of this paper is devoted to proving this point, using theoretical arguments and practical experience to show that there is a causal relationship that explains the association between religion and civic activity.

Ultimately, when considering both my own statistical analysis and the conclusions from the secondary literature, it seems quite clear that religious involvement has a significant and positive effect, even if modest, on civic engagement. Those who attend church regularly and those who believe religion is an important part of their life tend to participate more in a wide array of political, civic, and social activities; or, as Putnam would say, those who are involved in religion tend to have larger stocks of social capital. The next section of this paper seeks to explain why this is so, to understand the means by which religion can serve as resource to aid individuals in getting involved in their communities.

III. A Theory of Engagement: Religion as a Civic Resource

What do we mean when we say that religion can be a “civic resource”? Burns Stanfield, lead pastor at Fourth Presbyterian Church in South Boston, has a great summary answer:

I believe as a pastor I can encourage involvement in a few ways. First is to get people involved in their communities, to ask them to help their neighbors and those around them. But more important is in teaching people in the congregation how to be good citizens—encouraging them to vote, to pay attention to local politics and current events...People who are functioning in a community, like a church, are more able and skilled to be more active in the broader community. When you get involved in a small community in this way, you are functioning in a group in ways that you need to be a good citizen....*We develop the muscles to function in the community, the same muscles you can use in civic life. The church can help people to exercise these muscles....* So a church can be one ‘practical’ way to get people involved, to use something that’s important to them to draw their attention to some obligations you have in the community” (emphasis added).

Religious congregations across the United States are places where individuals can learn about, come to understand, and gain experience with civil society. Lofty concepts like *community* and *citizenship* are not only frequently discussed in sermons, but through individuals' further commitment in the congregation—taking on responsibility for church governance or religious education, volunteering with a church group to serve those in need, or even simply meeting with friends after worship for coffee and donuts—these concepts come alive and, no longer simply concepts but realities, become daily practice for millions of Americans.

Solving the Problems of Collective Action and Democratic Citizenship. Scholars have for a long time discussed the relationship between religious congregations and a strong civil society in America. The best know of these discussions comes from Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in the 1830s and 1840s about the then unique phenomenon of democracy as it was seen in America. Tocqueville taught us that in a democracy, when men are both free and equal, there are a unique set of challenges one must overcome before one can arrive at good citizenship, problems that must be confronted if a democratic society is to function effectively. Tocqueville argues that in many ways voluntary associations in general and, for a few additional reasons, religious congregations in particular serve to mitigate these unique difficulties of citizenship in a democracy. This is one way to think about religion as a “civic resource.”

Perhaps the most pressing challenge, Tocqueville, explains, is overcoming the weakness of individual citizens. Once the systematic hierarchies of obligations in an aristocratic society are broken down, that is when each individual is independent of every other, “no one is obliged to lend his force to those like him and no one has the right to expect great support from those like him.” This leaves individuals, on their own, in a state of weakness, debility, and impotence. The

state, however, is an “immense being that arises alone” out of the crowd of equals—and thus it may be only to the state that people turn to overcome their weakness in a time of need (Tocqueville 2000, 644). This may lead to a paternalistic “tutelary” state that cradles citizens in a happy servitude, a kind of despotism that is none better than the monarchical tyranny Americans worked so hard to overthrow (Tocqueville 2000, 662-663).

Religious communities, like similar voluntary organizations such as fraternal orders and labor unions, combat the specter of an all-powerful state by serving as “mediating institutions.” These are organizations of individuals that exist in between the individual and the state, and provide “citizens opportunities for meeting one another, forming and articulating their views, and serving their communities” outside of their homes but also outside of the confines of government (Wuthnow 2008, 298). Furthermore, Tocqueville describes such “mediating institutions” as the places where citizens come to experience, learn, understand, and function effectively in groups and communities—facilitating that collective action which is essential to a vibrant democracy. Such “associations can therefore be considered great schools, free of charge, where all citizens come to learn the general theory of associations” (Tocqueville 2000, 497).

A second challenge of democratic citizenship is a trend towards intellectual anarchy. As Tocqueville explains, the independence and equality of Americans leads each individual to desire to reach their own conclusions about truth, using the power of their own reason. This is a result of the equal social state of democratic peoples: since there are no longer any “incontestable signs of greatness and superiority [in particular people or groups, all] are constantly led back toward their own reason as the most visible and closest source of truth.” So long as each man’s intellect is taken at the same inherent value as every other, each will take “the rule of their judgment only from themselves.” In such a climate, left to itself, there will tend to be little

deference to traditional or common sources of intellectual and moral authority. And we know that “without common ideas there is no common action, and without common action men still exist, but a social body does not” (403-407). When such intellectual anarchy reigns, each man is an island, isolated in his individual beliefs and distrustful of every other. A prosperous social body cannot exist without some men uniting in collective action, uniting for a common purpose, or pooling resources to provide public goods. A constitutional, liberal democracy under such conditions would be impossible.

While the Christian religion no longer serves as a universally shared, dogmatic moral authority for our country in the way that it did in Tocqueville’s time, it does continue to provide “common beliefs” around which people unite to take collective action. The values and beliefs shared among members of a particular congregation can serve as a strong rallying point for “common action,” and create a sense of solid group identity around such shared values (drawing each individual off of his island). Individual congregations, moreover, still offer their members a set of basic “moral criteria for judging the performance of the state” and public life (Leege 1988, 711). If religion is no longer the universal authority it once was, it still serves as a strong force combating intellectual isolation and anarchy.

A final problem of democratic citizenship arises from the isolation and individualism that democracy has the potential to breed. In the name of equalized conditions, democracy breaks down aristocracy’s institutionalized social links and civic obligations that bind people together through family and bind people to their neighbors and community through roles of social class. People become self-sufficient and self-reliant when they are given political and civic equality—they feel that they “owe nothing to anyone” and “expect nothing from anyone.” Democracy constantly leads man “back toward himself alone and threatens finally to confine him wholly in

the solitude of his own heart” or at least in the solitude of his own immediate family. In such circumstances, with no established social links or civic obligations, people have every inclination to turn inward to concerns of their immediate private life at the expense of public life. This is the problem of individualism (482-484).

In the absence of institutionalized social and civic networks, such ties have to be created “artificially” through the voluntary associations of citizens. This is a perpetual problem for any democracy, but is nevertheless an important one to overcome. Tocqueville writes,

Sentiments and ideas renew themselves, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed only by the reciprocal action of men upon one another. I have shown that this action is almost nonexistent in a democratic country. It is therefore necessary to create it artificially there. And this is what associations alone can do (491).

Religious institutions, especially in Tocqueville’s time, have been perhaps the most important and enduring forms of civic association in America, inserting people into social networks of “reciprocal action” that can enlarge the heart and help people get into the habit of thinking beyond their own immediate individualistic concerns. Religion creates a spiritual obligation for citizens to attend mass and participate in their church; the social networks and civic ties that are cultivated among neighbors through the institution of the church and the interactions they find there are not the church’s primary purposes, but they are certainly salutary effects for the functioning of democracy.

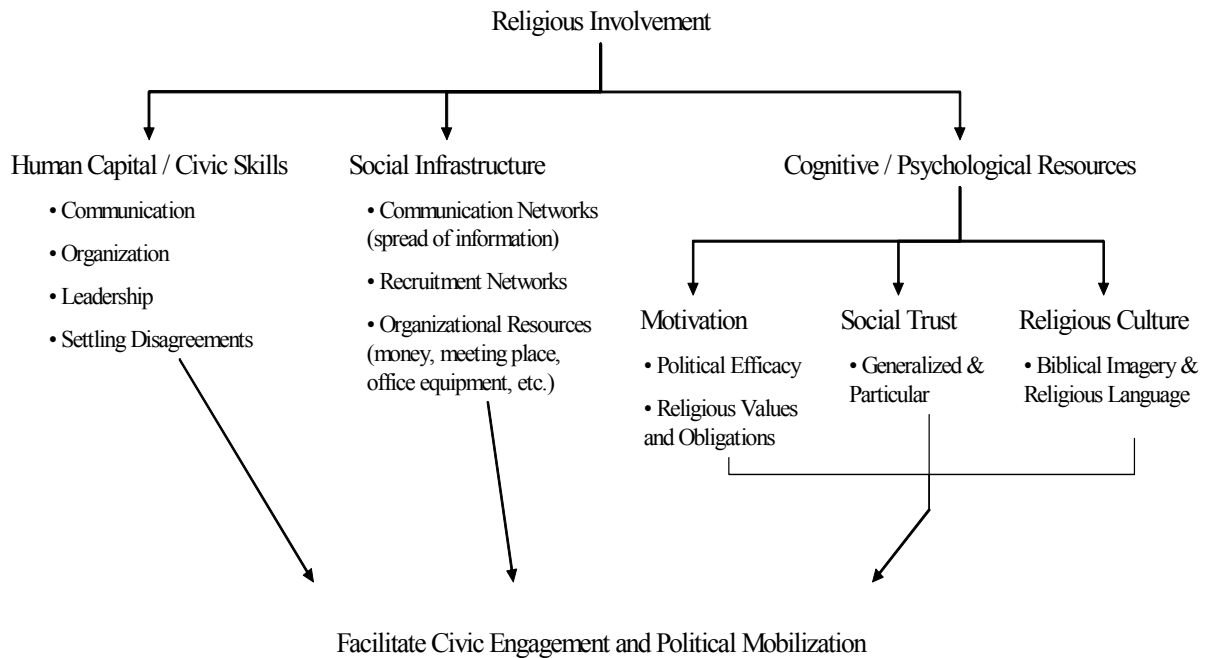
Religious institutions, however, can promote democracy more than the typical civic associations that simply inculcate democratic skills and habits. Along with religion comes *values* that are also beneficial to combating individualistic tendencies. Tocqueville tells us that religious teachings help to encourage the doctrine of self-interest rightly understood, writing that, “it is true that Christianity tells us that one must prefer others to oneself to gain Heaven; but Christianity tells us as well that one ought to do good to those like oneself out of love of God”

(504-505). Men are taught through religion to put the interests of others ahead of their own, because this is what God desires. This raises people's sights above their own immediate needs, away from the stagnation of individual pursuits, and "brings them to aid each other and disposes them to sacrifice a part of their time and their wealth to the good of the state" (502). This is essential for democracy.

In Tocqueville's analysis we have seen a sketchy outline for a theory of engagement, a theory for overcoming the problems of collective action and citizenship inherent to any democratic system—this is one angle from which to view the issue of civic engagement. Religious congregations, by teaching democracy and promoting active citizenship to their members, help to overcome the weakness of individuals, the intellectual anarchy, and the isolation in individualism that all arise as a result of an "equality of conditions" and a "democratic social state." Together these three problems need to be overcome to allow a vibrant civil society to thrive in a democracy.

But for a more complete analysis we must delve deeper than Tocqueville's particular angle to understand exactly the role that congregations play in this process. What do citizens "learn" in these "great schools" of voluntary associations (as all religious communities are)? What use can these social networks and organizations of individuals be? What democratic worth are the values and moral obligations preached by the churches and synagogues? Tocqueville's musings, and indeed all the musings of subsequent literature that has attempted to answer these questions, can be boiled down into three overarching categories by which religious congregations can aid civic engagement: civic skills, social and organizational infrastructure, and psychological resources. Figure 1 summarizes these three categories, each of which I'll expound upon in turn.

Figure 1 – Civic/Political Resources Derived from Religious Involvement



Civic Skills. Faith Perry, a member of the progressive Church of the Covenant in the heart of downtown Boston, has been working in their food pantry for many years. A member at the church since 1983, she got involved in volunteering for the church’s food pantry because it seemed like a very simple way to get involved in meeting the obligations of her Christian faith. Quoting from memory a famous passage from Matthew 25, she recalled Jesus’ words, “what you have done for the least of these you have done for me.” After working with the pantry for a while and enjoying the work, Faith gradually increased her time commitments. Eventually she joined the pantry’s planning committee where she learned to write grants to get funding, learned better ways to perform client services, learned how to work with databases to keep track of inventory and other records, became familiar with USDA guidelines relevant to her work, learned to train and recruit other volunteers, and now serves as the supervisor of the pantry.

Through her volunteer work with the food pantry, Faith also became connected with and interested in other projects the church was working on. She began working on the church's chapter of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, a more politically-oriented group working for social justice in the Boston area, through which she learned a number of political skills, such as getting signatures for petitions, speaking in front of small groups of people, organizing for campaigns, and more. She is now the coordinator of outreach and charity programs, a leader on the Missions and Advocacy Committee that oversees all of the charity projects going on at the Church of the Covenant. With all of these commitments I had to ask:

INT: It sounds like you've gotten quite involved in a lot of different things. Did you have to receive any kind of special education or training to do what you do now?

FAITH: It wasn't really any extensive formal training; I mostly just picked it all up along the way, learned by observing, and learned from other volunteers. *I learned most of it just by doing.* We really are a "do-it-yourself" kind of church (emphasis added).

Faith, of course, is somewhat of an outlier, for not everyone who volunteers at their church is exposed to this many *civic skills*—organizational and communication skills such as coordinating meetings or speaking in public that, once mastered, allow individuals to effectively use their resources of time and money and thereby increase the productivity of their activism (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). But Faith serves as a perfect example of the vast array of hands-on experience, knowledge, skills, and abilities that everyday people have the opportunity to "learn by doing" when becoming active in their congregations. When people know they have such experience and skills, seeing that they have something they can contribute, they are more likely to transfer these skills and participate other forms of civic activity.

As Verba, Schlozman, and Brady show, religious congregations are not necessarily the best place for opportunities for the practice of civic skills—both secular voluntary associations and the workplace provide more real opportunities. But the opportunities in these other organizations are much more stratified by income, by race, and by gender. Religious

congregations do not face this problem, for “the domain of equal access to opportunities to learn civic skills is the church” (1995, 320). For people who are not otherwise engaged in community, civic, or political life, congregations can serve as a point of entry into a life of civic engagement, an avenue by which civic skills can be imparted in a more egalitarian manner. As Jones-Correa and Leal point out, minorities in America, especially Latinos, do not have as many “opportunities available for political contact and recruitment.” They continue, “For African- and European-Americans, churches operate as one, if perhaps the most important one, of many civic associations in the community. But for Latinos, as noted above, church membership is particularly significant because for many this is their primary, and often only, mode of civic engagement” (2001, 755-756). Congregations thus play a special role, if indeed modest when compared to the magnitude that the workplace and secular associations, in that they “provide opportunities for the development of civic skills to those who would otherwise be resource-poor” (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 18).

I will discuss here three particularly relevant categories of skills that individuals regularly practice while participating in congregation activity: communication skills, organizational and leadership skills, and skills of democratic decision-making. The most important for Faith, as she discussed with me, was the communication skills she gained. The client-service-oriented nature of her work in the food pantry required “the ability to talk and communicate with people, to appreciate people, and to appreciate working with all different kinds of people.” One thing that she gained from such work, as she told me, was that she “became a lot less shy than she used to be. I became more willing to talk to strangers.” Communication and language skills are important in any kind of activity, and are perhaps the most easily transferable to other undertakings, as Verba, Schlozman, and Brady would argue. “Presumably,” they write,

“someone who routinely writes letters, gives speeches,” or discusses matters in a group setting, “will be more likely to feel confident about undertaking these activities” in other activity.

The individual who, for example, commands verbal skills—a wide vocabulary, an ability to formulate and articulate an argument—will be more effective and persuasive when he or she decides to speak up. Moreover, we would expect someone who has these skills—perhaps as the result of opportunities to make speeches in other contexts—to be more likely to feel capable of making a statement at a community or political meeting and thus, to do so (1995, 305).

A second important set of skills regularly practiced in congregational activity is organizational or leadership skills. Organizing and coordinating meetings, committees, projects, or events were the most common activities mentioned by the volunteers that I spoke with. All congregations—big and small, Christian and Jewish, liberal and conservative—involve their members in activities and projects that go beyond the weekly worship service, and all utilize the manpower of their members to pull together such activities. Those that take on leadership roles in planning and organizing activities also gain important leadership skills. One of the more important aspects that a few leaders discussed was finding the best way to utilize the skills and interests of each of the volunteers they had recruited. “A challenge is to get people to follow-through with commitments to using time out of their busy lives,” Anne Saevig of St. Joseph’s Catholic Parish in New Hope, MN said. “This is where my job comes in. I have to have things laid out for people and supporting people when they come in...I’ve learned a whole lot of skills about how to place people appropriately” to direct their interests and passions into action, “while at the same time utilizing the skills” of the volunteers.

There is at least one final skill congregation members regularly practice that is even more directly relevant to democratic citizenship: engaging in democratic processes of decision making. Susan Stewart is the Church Coordinator at the United Methodist Calvary Church in Arlington, MA, a congregation where members have particularly strong opportunities to learn the habits of democratic process. The way decisions were made in this church gave people direct experience

with democracy. As a member of the Missions and Advocacy Committee at the church (the charitable or social justice arm, if you will), Susan explained to me how the committee regularly held meetings with the congregation to get input on what the members thought should be the Committee's priorities of action. In this way all of the members of the congregation, not simply those who were active on the Committee, could determine together how to best use the church's resources. Moreover, when a controversial issue emerged in the church, in her example their recent development of an official church "stance" on if and how to welcome gay and lesbian individuals into the congregation, the issue is dealt with by a "deliberative process" in which they had "adopted a policy of consensus." She explained to me in full how their church went about this process:

We discussed it. We held info sessions on it. When we were working on adopting a welcoming statement, everyone was invited to participate in the process and express their opinions and then adopt a statement that all agreed upon at a final meeting. What we tried to do was to get to the point where everyone agreed such that they didn't have any severe reservations about the statement. If anyone truly said "I can't support this" then the statement would not go forward and we would try to work out something else. The important thing underlying all of this was to try to talk with people.

Not all religious congregations are organized as democratically and deliberatively as Calvary Church, but nearly all, as voluntary organizations that necessarily rely on membership contributions of both manpower and funds, have some similar processes of getting input and generating ideas from their membership body. In fact, one study showed that approximately one third of all individuals who are involved in their congregations at least occasionally attend meetings where they take part in making decisions (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 311-312). In this manner those who are involved in their churches get experience in learning the habits of democracy.

Many of the leaders that I interviewed discussed at length the importance of learning about *building consensus* and *making compromises* out of a group's differing viewpoints in order

to move forward in creating policy. Jane Metcalf, president of the Church Service League at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Chestnut Hill, MA, thought that learning to “tolerate differences of opinion and how to not let these differences drive groups apart” was perhaps the most important thing she had learned in her years volunteering with the organization. “It’s OK to have disagreement about things,” she commented, and continued,

but we need to talk and discuss about these differences of opinion. In dealing with these tensions, you need to learn to conduct discussion on how things can change, and learn to frame and coordinate these discussions and try to mediate and get a good outcome.... We need to learn to be open and transparent about all things to best encourage discussion on disagreement. Most important is that you have to learn to be dynamic and not static.

In a religious setting, moreover, these dialogues are facilitated because they are conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and patience. “The spiritual element breeds tolerant discussions,” Pastor Dan Smith of First Church in Cambridge said, and instead of bickering you have “mostly dialogue, discussion, and getting educated about the issues.” When one can “pray across differences” instead of getting emotional and heated, a healthy environment in which to learn to build consensus is readily available. Such democratic skills—learning the process of democratic decision making, coming to consensus out of differing viewpoints, and making compromises to move decisions forward—are especially important to develop in a democratic society, but most important for our present discussion is that such skills can be transferred and utilized to facilitate collective action in other forms of activity, particularly political activity in which there are oftentimes quite significant disagreements surrounding the development of policy statements.

In sum, it is without doubt that those who participate in their congregations come away with one kind of “civic resource” that can be used in all forms of participation they might pursue: civic skills that make for productive use of the time and money spent in activity, and facilitate all forms of collective action. We turn now to another, more tangible resource that congregations provide: organizational and social infrastructure.

Social Infrastructure. A congregation has a worship center, a gathering space for believers to meet at least for regular worship. A congregation has an office and a staff, however small, to run the business of the organization. A congregation has a budget, office equipment, and a weekly bulletin of announcements perhaps. But most importantly, a congregation has a network of *people*, a base of members bound together for a common purpose, sharing a common identity, and in a common community. These are all aspects of another important “civic resource” that religious congregations contribute. *Social Infrastructure* is the aggregate of tools and resources congregations have at their disposal as an organization with a large base of membership. Some of these organizational resources are tangible things: space ready for gatherings or meetings, a budget and funds to support projects and activities, a professional staff that can provide support, office equipment that can facilitate the completion of projects, and many more that, while they may seem mundane, are nevertheless essential for collective action of any sort.

But a more powerful resource in the congregation is the tight social network that exists among members. Wald and Calhoun-Brown are particularly thoughtful on this point, emphasizing the power that church networks hold. “For example,” they write, “the Baptist Joint Committee [a religious advocacy organization of Baptist churches on the national level] potentially has millions of constituents that can be activated through thousands of churches for a particular political cause.” Other national membership organizations, the National Rifle Association or the Sierra Club for example, do not have the same vast networks of ready-made local “chapters” (each of which has its own ready-made network which connects the “chapter” with many, many individuals) as church-based organizations do, and therefore, as Wald and Calhoun-Brown explain, they do not have the same kind of “automatic access to the base” of

constituents (2007, 135). Individual congregations use this same process, only on a smaller scale; through the congregation's social network they can quickly connect with and mobilize their members to participate in community activities, local events, or service opportunities. The social networks available within a congregation can be utilized for two different purposes: to spread relevant information (a communication network) and to recruit individuals for activity (a recruitment network).

For the communication networks featured in congregations, perhaps most symbolic of this resource is the church bulletin, full every week with announcements about upcoming events both within the congregation and out in the community, and with essays both from the pastor and from fellow members about the meaning of religious commitment. The former is a powerful tool to keep people informed about opportunities to get involved. As Holly Nimchuk of New Hope Church in New Hope, MN, said, "We announce all of our activities in the church bulletin; our new members read the bulletin and get involved in something that catches their interest." The latter quite often touch upon themes of what religion means for obligations to the community. A past bulletin announcement from the aforementioned Calvary Church featured a message from the church's pastor explaining the official position the congregation was taking on "Question 1" on the Massachusetts state ballot in November 2008. Question 1 was a binding referendum question which proposed the elimination of the state income tax. Pastor Christine Elliot wrote,

The elimination of the income tax, with its \$12 billion revenue stream, would devastate essential services and programs for the poorest and most vulnerable citizens of the Commonwealth. That would be, I believe, completely unacceptable according to the mandates of the Judeo-Christian tradition: to do justice and to attend to the neediest people in our community.

She then went on write that it was our "Christian responsibility" to "not ever be afraid to discuss the important decisions that shape our life together," and encouraged her members to carefully consider the issue and to vote on it on Election Day. Beyond the church bulletin, newer forms of

communication mediums, such as e-mail listservs and congregation websites, provide additional avenues whereby relevant information can be quickly and easily spread.

The congregation itself can be an originator of relevant political or community information, rather than just a tight system for relaying that information. For example, Jason Wittak, the coordinator of social justice and outreach programs at St. Joseph's Parish in New Hope, MN, told me about the recent issue forums sponsored by the parish center on health equity and affordable housing, forums where anyone from the surrounding community could come to learn about and discuss these issues of community importance.

We tend to focus on more local issues, things which we feel our parishioners have some capacity to make a difference, things like local bills on affordable housing and school board issues....With any issues like these you need to hear different views, need to hear the strong opinions on both sides of the issues, and come to understandings of the issues. For me, I think it's important to discuss how faith and faith values impact issues. And we have to listen to one another, not simply just vote "up" or "down" on these issues.

Clergy, furthermore, are in a particularly strong position to spread information about local events and about politics, or, as Wald and Calhoun-Brown put it, "to politicize grievances in a way that facilitates social change." What other "opinion leaders" in the community "have an audience who voluntarily comes to hear what they have to say" on a regular basis (2007, 131)? And it is clear that clergy are willing to spread such "politicized" information, discussing issues of importance and encouraging their congregants to get involved, so long as they stop short of discussing electoral politics. From my own (admittedly unrepresentative) sample of congregations, in 20 out of 25 of the congregations I visited (80%) did the respondent say that their pastors encouraged their congregation to think about community and political matters and to get involved in public life. Though never directly touching directly upon partisan politics, as required by law in order to keep their tax exempt status, congregations nonetheless are a rich resource for the spread of political and community information via communication networks.

It is important to note that this is not the case in all congregations. In some important exceptions, the particular culture of the congregation demands a strong separation between their space of worship and political matters. In such congregations political and community information is often not spread readily, because members feel uneasy or uncomfortable allowing such issues into their conversations, and pastors at these churches stay focused on spiritual matters. “Churches are not primarily intended to function as political movements but as spiritual agencies,” Wald, Owen, and Hill write. “Perhaps the most effect limit upon their political capacity is the resistance of members to ‘excessive’ political entanglement,” stemming from “the strong U.S. tradition of separation of church and state” (1988, 534). This was echoed nearly word for word in by a few of my interview responses. “Things that become too political in nature can be controversial in our congregation,” Evelyn Frankford of Temple Beth Zion in Brookline commented. “Many of our congregants object to things that are too political.” On the whole, however, my experience when conducting the research for this project was that there were many more congregations willing to engage energetically with community and political issues than those that were not. We will see evidence later about the number of American churches that engage directly in political activity.

The social network that exists within a congregation can also serve as a site for recruitment to additional activity either within or beyond the walls of the congregation. These recruitment networks reach a lot of people. Fully one third of church members interviewed in one study had been asked to take part in some political action (Verba, Schlozman, Brady 1995, 378). However, these analysts ask only about requests to participate in *political* activity—the resulting number would be significantly higher if they had asked about requests to participate in

other forms of community or social activity (non-political civic activities such as attending a dinner party or participating in a blood drive, for example).

Recruitment networks through a congregation are especially powerful because such connections are often through deeply personal ties of friendship and/or shared belief and identity. Such “personal requests” are much more successful than more impersonal requests, requests that come from organizations through the mail or from friends of friends. As Verba, Schlozman, and Brady write, “reflecting these personal links, requests through neighborhood, workplace, and organizational networks have a relatively high probability of success.” The request success rate for an organization like a congregation is quite high. Of those asked to participate fully “57 percent said yes to fellow organization members” (Verba, Schlozman, Brady 1995, 145). “Nothing beats a personal invitation when you’re trying to sign people up,” says Anne Saevig of St. Joseph’s Parish. “It really connects with people more, because you can use your knowledge of them and can get them involved in things you know they’re interested in.” Through the personal relationships built among friends and fellow members within a congregation, individuals come to know who has what skills and what interests, and can draw upon these when the time comes that he or she needs recruits for a project or event. This is a powerful resource aiding mobilization to activity.

The common theme among all of the organizational resources we may find in a congregation is that they *lower the cost of participation*, and thereby increase the probability that an individual will engage in civic activity. Whether it is by making it easier to spread information about what is going on in the community, facilitating the process of recruiting people for activities and projects, or even simply providing resources such as space or funding that could not be obtained easily otherwise, a congregation provides a framework through which

individuals can carry out their desires to get involved. A number of those who I interviewed echoed this thought about the role that congregations can play. Anne Saevig commented:

A lot of people have ideals for making a difference in the community or doing some project that matters to them....Our job in adult ministry is to provide a venue where people can carry out these personal interests. Our most successful programs are the ones when we connect people's interests with the resources we have here.

As Jason Wittak puts it, a congregation provides a “clear path” and an “outlet” for volunteers to get connected to opportunities. Or as Susan Stewart said, “The church community provides a lot of easy ways to get involved because the framework is already there.” Whether we’re talking about resources, outlets, or frameworks, a congregation is in any event a resource which members can draw upon to help fulfill their desire to get involved. But where does this desire to participate come from in the first place? As we will see from the next section, for many people a great part of the motivation to get involved comes from the values and obligations learned in the same religious congregation that provides the resources to carry out these commitments.

Psychological Resources: The Role of Attitudes and Values. In the previous two subsections, we have been discussing resources for participation that are more tangible in nature, things like information, skills, funding, and social networks. What we are moving into now is a discussion about how religion can develop the less tangible psychological resources necessary for participation—attitudes and values such as civic-mindedness, social trust, and political efficacy that encourage people to participate. Weithman calls these psychological resources the “subjective conditions of realized citizenship,” and he explains:

In the contemporary United States, much of the *formation of citizens* is effected through people's involvement in churches and religious organizations. There is ample empirical evidence to show that many people become interested in politics, informed about it and active in it through their churches. Churches convey political information to their congregants, and convey the sense that liberal democratic government is legitimate and is responsive to voters. They also convey the psychological concomitants of citizenship, including senses of empowerment and self-worth. This is especially so for the poor and for minorities. Churches can also foster attitudes towards the

symbols and myths which are central to a nation's political cultures. In these ways, churches make important contributions to many people's sense of themselves as citizens (2002, 34).

Religion's psychological resources serve to encourage civic engagement in three ways:

(1) they strongly reinforce the motivation to participate by teaching the moral obligation to be active in the community, by serving as a basis for political action on "moral issues," and by increasing personal political efficacy; (2) they generate both particularized and generalized social trust; and (3) they are part of a shared religious culture of imagery, language, and identity that can be drawn upon by leaders to mobilize participants. We'll consider each in turn.

There is considerable support among scholars for the claim that, for many people, religious values serve as a motivation to serve the community and become active in public life. This motivation stems from three sources: values of civic duty taught by the church, mobilization around "moral issues" that have their basis in religious teachings, and a sense of political efficacy acquired through religious beliefs.

First we'll discuss teachings of civic duty. Macaluso and Wanat, explaining the connection between church attendance and voting found both in their data and in my own, argue that congregations "foster feelings of civic duty" by teaching the sacred character of civic obligations. In an environment that places a "high value on order, ritual, duty, legitimacy, and respectability," civic activities such as voting become more than just a task, but rather "obligations" with sacred meaning (1979, 160-161). When voting and participation in other forms of civic activity are seen as God's will, a sacred obligation, religious people experience a strong motivation to carry out this obligation.

We see this theme in both Christian and Jewish theology. Charles Mathewes is a Christian theologian who articulates a "theology of public life." He writes that the consummation of Christian experience "during the world" is a life of service to the community.

Self-sacrifice for the good of the other is crucial towards building “patience,” for the day when one is to enter the afterlife. Becoming “involved in public life both richly as citizens...and thoroughly as *Christians*” is, in fact, a requirement for the complete “spiritual formation” of the Christian (2007, 2, 13). Christians are to become active in the communities around them not only because it makes them better citizens, but also because it makes them better Christians.

A similar theological basis for participation in public life is found in Judaism. *Tikkun Olam*, “repairing the world,” is an important concept in Hebrew scripture that is emphasized at many Jewish congregations. Humanity, the teaching goes, has a responsibility to change and improve its earthly surroundings. Oftentimes this means performing works of *tzedakah*, acts of justice or righteousness, out in the community. It is people, and not just God, who can bring the world to a better state (Noparstak 2009). Parenti found this concept to be important when studying the ways in which religious cultures influenced congregants’ political values:

An important component of the morality of Judaism is the continuing obligation to live with some dedication to social betterment and justice. Prayer and personal piety alone do not make one a Jew. Redemption is to be found in the worldly enactment of God’s love and charity as evidenced by one’s efforts on behalf of his fellow men and his community: one must be “a Jew for the world” (1967, 262).

Such messages of civic duty and active citizenship are certainly shared in congregations—with pastors from the pulpit encouraging their members to get involved, and fellow members reminding each other of the deep moral obligations they have to the community—but how can we know for sure that such messages actually stick with people, that is, whether they actually make a measurable impact on individuals’ behavior. The evidence confirms that religious values and teachings do play a key role in shaping people’s “orientations toward worldly activity” in general, and their political orientations in particular. For example, Parenti, puzzling over the problem of “irrational” political behavior (political action that works to minimize rather than maximize socio-economic self interest), found that it was religion that

more often than not explained the counterintuitive behavior. He concluded “the ideational content of sectarian systems, especially in regard to beliefs about man’s nature, his redemption, and his commitments to the temporal world...may produce, or help explain, political orientations that cannot readily be explained as manifestations of rational material self-interest” (1967, 261). In other words, the effect of religion on people’s political orientations is often strong enough to incite people to act politically against their own material self-interest.

Statistical analysis has shown, furthermore, that the relationship between a congregation’s political outlook and an individual member’s political outlook is not due to self-selection effects. Wald, Owen, and Hill (1988) found that those who held conservative values on “moral issues” had adopted these stances from their conservative churches—they held such values because they had learned them from their church environment, *not* because they already held conservative values and selected a conservative church accordingly. “Messages from the pulpit and social interaction with congregants,” they wrote, “apparently promote a common political outlook among church members.” The authors thus concluded that churches were “fertile ground” for the dissemination of political orientations. When a pastor or a fellow congregation member speaks up about the sacred obligation to get involved in the public life of the community, people *do* take heart and respond with action.

All of these claims were supported by my conversations with congregation activists. Of all the conclusions that were most clearly suggested by my interviews, the one that was most clear was that religious values served as a strong motivation to get involved in serving and engaging with the community. Almost without fail, when asked why they thought serving the community was important, religious activists responded by citing their religious obligation to be active in the community. Echoing Mathewes’ “theology of public life,” for example, Holly

Nimchuk of New Hope Church told me that she was interested in community service through her church because “it’s what we are called to do. We are to be outward focused and to be there for others, not to be in it for ourselves. When you give you get more than you give, since you become more blessed by giving. It is my responsibility as a believer to do good for others.” For Austin Calhoun of the evangelical Protestant Highrock Church in Arlington, MA, serving the community “is what made the Gospel come alive for” him. “Faith seemed dead to me without serving the community and loving those around me. It is our job to be active participants and to be a vital part of the neighborhood.” Bunny Arseneau of St. Raphael’s Catholic Church added, “it is our mission to use our God-given skills and share them with others.” Becca Oehrig of Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, MN, commented that their pastor “definitely does encourage people to get involved in politics. He likes to emphasize that it is our right, privilege, and obligation as members of a democratic society to use our voice to make decisions.” Dan Smith, the Pastor at First Church UCC in Cambridge, MA, often preaches to his congregation that

we need to think more broadly than about ourselves, to follow as Jesus did and care for our neighbors, to love our neighbors....Involvement in church raises the bar for what’s possible for community action, because going to church reminds me that I have work to do to live up to these incredible standards....It all has to do with moral and spiritual values and our call to bring God’s love into the world.

Not all congregations preach the values of active service to the community, some quite clearly call for a withdrawal from a world full of sin and to take shelter in the church. But it was my experience that many more preach active citizenship, and preach it not just as part of being a good citizen but also as part of being a good Christian or Jew.

Churches and synagogues also contribute to a sense of civic-mindedness because of how very self-conscious they are about what it means to be a part of a community, both within the church and in connecting with the surrounding neighborhood, in a way that other organizations and associations are not. Nowhere is your attention called to the concept of community as

frequently as it is in a congregation. Pastor Burns Stanfield explains that this is because “part of our faith life is to nurture us *as part of a community*. It is simply part of the church’s values and traditions” (emphasis added). Bill Kelley of Holy Name Catholic Church in Newton, MA, is President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a small group of Catholic parishioners who do charity work for individuals who come into the church asking for help. He emphasized the important place that building community had in his church’s service activities:

It’s important to me that when you do service to do it as a community, in a community you live in. Other organizations don’t get as directly engaged in their communities, helping their neighbors directly, as we do. It is important to *meet* the people and get to know your neighbors that are in need....I enjoy this type of service because it helps people in my neighborhood. It brings a sense of ownership of the community when doing service to help you neighbors, to actually see the people you’re helping.

For Mr. Kelley, furthermore, it was important to him that he had a sense that he was doing community service that was more personal than what government could provide. “We serve as a kind of small safety net for our community, and I’m proud to think that I’m a part of this.” Oftentimes religious teachings raise people’s awareness of themselves as a member of a community, fighting off the isolation in individualism that Tocqueville feared.

Second, religious values encourage participation not only because they create an obligation to be active in public life, but also because they have something to say about how people should act and how our society should be run. Such values can be a legitimate guide and “standard for moral conduct in the public life of the community” and “a basis for action or public policy” (Wuthnow 2008, 283-286). Or, as Wald and Calhoun-Brown put it, “religion has so much political potential because it prescribes not only how we as individuals should live, but also suggests the nature of the just society (2007, 112). When believers see a policy as contrary to these deeply held values, oftentimes this is a strong incentive to get involved politically—a few examples include a right-to-life activist protesting *Roe v. Wade* or a social justice activist working to ensure affordable housing in a community.

Campbell shares an example of a “natural experiment” showing evangelical Protestant’s rapid political mobilization surrounding an issue that threatened their deep-seated moral values. In 1999 a state-wide referendum was held to determine whether Alabama’s constitution should be amended to allow a state-run lottery. Framed by religious leaders as a “moral issue,” the referendum “ignited massive church-based political mobilization.” Evangelical Protestants turned out to vote on the issue at a much higher rate than Alabama residents generally—56% of evangelicals made it to the polls while only 44% of the general population did so. When compared to the regularly-scheduled gubernatorial election just a year before in 1998, only 47% of evangelicals turned out to vote whereas 56% the general Alabama population cast a vote. The evangelicals made more effort to vote when turnout was least expected: on a ballot initiative in an off-year referendum. As Campbell concludes, “voter mobilization in the 1999 referendum is better explained by religious than political affiliation” (2004, 169-173).

I witnessed a similar example of church-based political mobilization surrounding a ballot initiative in the state of Massachusetts in 2008. As mentioned previously, Question 1 on the ballot was an initiative to eliminate the state income tax, an over \$12 billion revenue stream for the state. Working through an organization called the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, churches and synagogues across the Boston area were put to work calling neighborhood residents and holding events to encourage opposition to the initiative. Religious people rallied around the issue because they saw it as a threat to their “moral vision” of their responsibility to the poor and to the community generally. As Pastor Christine Elliott of Calvary Church wrote in her weekly bulletin, “that would be, I believe, completely unacceptable according to the mandates of the Judeo-Christian tradition: to do justice and to attend to the neediest people in our community.”

Pastor Quinn Caldwell of Old South Church discussed with me the way in which their church often connects their religious values to political issues and understanding current events. A recent program sponsored by the church was a rally to raise awareness about climate change issues. At lunch time the church rang their bell 350 times to draw attention to the issue. It was religious values that provided the motivation for the program. “Climate change is troublesome,” Quinn explained to me, “because the Earth is not ours, it is God’s. We are stewards of his Earth and we have to do what we can to take care of it. There’s lots of reasons to pay attention to climate change issues, but that’s our particular take on it.” “The real political power of churches,” Campbell writes, “lies in their ability to mobilize people to vote who would not otherwise be politically active, which is distinct from political organizations encouraging their supporters—who by definition are already politically active—to vote a certain way” (2004, 170).

A final source of motivation to participation that can be found in churches and synagogues is the political efficacy congregants gain through their religious involvement. Weithman writes that “acting on our identity as citizens to satisfy our obligations, assert our rights or take part in politics requires confidence that our actions will be effective.” Many of the activities of citizenship such as speaking up at a public meeting or confronting public officials “draw on initiative, confidence or even courage, and a sense of efficacy or empowerment.” Within a congregation, coming to an understanding of its teachings and values can bring an individual to “a sense of empowerment and self-worth” (2002, 14-15, 34). Harris has shown a statistically significant positive relationship between internal religiosity and political efficacy (though I found less support for this claim in my own data), as it works to improve a person’s “self-esteem” and one’s knowledge of their “own internal strengths and weaknesses” (1994, 51). Becoming active in the congregation’s organizational life, as we saw before, gives individuals

opportunities to practice civic skills. Knowing one has practiced such skills makes one feel more confident and empowered to take on other civic activity.

In addition to an attitude of civic-mindedness, it has been shown that religion is linked with an additional attitude helpful for civic engagement: social trust. Smidt finds a curvilinear relationship between levels of social trust and frequency of church attendance, with social trust rising in all attendance categories except for the highest frequency of church attendance. He writes, “levels of interpersonal trust generally increase among respondents as their level of church attendance increases—until church attendance reaches its zenith” (1999, 187).² If religion increases social trust, then this is a powerful force aiding civic engagement. Putnam explains that social trust is an important prerequisite for engaging in acts of generalized reciprocity and for building social capital—both ingredients for a civically engaged citizen (2000, 134-137). Smidt, in his study, also finds statistical evidence to show that social trust on its own increases civic engagement, writing that “once one has controlled for both various sociodemographic variables and several religious variables, the independent impact of social trust on civic engagement continues to be evident and continues to be relatively strong” (1999, 190).

Shared religious language, culture, and symbols are also powerful psychological resources which, when drawn upon, can mobilize believers to take action in their communities. Through these cultural factors religion can construct collective or group identifications which “provide cognitive structures through which the world can be viewed” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2007, 113) and through which group-based patterns of judgments and behavior can form.

² Uslaner (2002) provides a possible explanation for this puzzling exception. Religious faithful who attend church with a very high frequency are more likely to be “particularized trusters” rather than “generalized trusters”—those that might not believe *everyone* can be trusted, but *do* believe that *some* people, mainly “folks like themselves,” can be trusted. For such people the “moral community is rather circumscribed” and may “withdraw from contact with ‘sinners’ and retreat into their own communities.” They may see themselves as “apart from people with different traditions and ideals.” They thus spend more time in their congregation, attending worship services for example, because this is the community into which they’ve withdrawn. Smidt’s data does not account for any difference between “generalized” and “particularized” trust.

When leaders draw upon these cultural factors, it can provide for individuals a powerful psychological connection to participation and activity. There is no example more frequently cited for this than the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., using “religious language and art forms to articulate views and motivate participants” in the civil rights movement. Former civil rights activist Andrew Young recalls Dr. King’s work in organizing the Mississippi Delta region:

Nobody could have ever argued segregation and integration and gotten people convinced to do anything about that. But when Martin Luther King would talk about leaving the slavery or Egypt and wandering into a promised land, somehow that made sense to folks. And they may not have understood it; it was nobody else’s political theory, but it was their grass roots ideology. It was their faith; it was the thing they had been nurtured on. And when they heard that language, they responded (quoted in Harris 1994, 50).

“As King’s biblical allusions showed,” Weithman writes, “the imagery and stories of the Bible could be used to express the aspirations for freedom that fueled the civil rights movement.”

Religion is thus in a unique position because it can “provide the concepts and narratives which some groups believe most accurately convey their experiences and aspirations” (2002, 53).

Religious cultural references resonate strongly with people psychologically, and thus serve as a powerful force to encourage collective action and civic engagement.

Section Summary. We have seen in the last three subsections that religion serves as a civic resource in three key ways: by providing opportunities for congregation members to develop and practice civic skills, by providing organizational resources and access to powerful communication and recruitment networks, and by inculcating civically-beneficial attitudes and values. It is important to note that what we have argued is not that *all* congregations provide *all* of these resources *all* of the time—we have noted cases in which congregations can actually encourage their members to withdraw from society and focus their time and attention solely within their congregation. My argument is solely this: that religion has an incredible *potential* to serve as a civic resource in these ways, and that we can find quite a few examples of how they do

so both in the conclusions of secondary literature and in my own examples from the interviews I conducted. I would like to suggest, furthermore, that more congregations serve as a benefit to civic engagement than those that do not.

IV. Application: Three Case Studies in How Congregations Relate to Civic Engagement

How is this ample stock of civic resources utilized in practice? We need to dig a little deeper to try to understand the way that such resources are actually transmitted from congregation to individual in practice. One way to think about this is to enquire how the different ways church activity is organized can affect what and how many civic resources are transmitted. Do some religious congregations do a better job at encouraging civic engagement than others? The answer is obviously yes, so why is this so? The answer, we will find, goes beyond the fact that some congregations place a lot of emphasis on teaching citizenship while others do not.

In this section I will borrow a type of analysis usually reserved for understanding political behavior in systems of government. Institutionalism studies how the organization and structure of activity in a system shapes the incentives, constraints, and thus the behavior of actors. What is an “institution”? March and Olsen explain:

An institution is a relatively enduring collection of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals and relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances (2005, 4).

In short, an institution is a rather durable *way of doing things* that continues to be practiced either because it is codified in a system of rules (as in constitutional government) or because it has become habitual amongst the doers (as in a church ladies group).

Institutionalism “takes an interest in the ways in which institutionalized rules, norms, and standard operating procedures impact behavior” (March and Olsen 2005, 7). It makes three important assumptions that we will follow here: (1) rules and practices structure behavior; (2) identities and belongings (structures of meaning) explain, justify, and give direction and meaning to behavior; and (3) structures of resources shape capabilities for acting.

What does any of this have to do with congregation groups? My argument is that the way that congregation activity—book clubs, bible studies, religious education, service opportunities, governance committees—is structured and organized powerfully affects what civic skills, organizational resources, and civic values are transmitted to individuals who participate. Holding constant the emphasis given to democratic citizenship within the groups (for it is obvious from the section on “psychological resources” that groups that emphasize a civic orientation more will encourage civic engagement more), some kinds of groups will be better at encouraging civic engagement than others because of the way they are structured.

A few scholars have attempted to classify church organizational structure into different categories. Roozen, McKinney, and Carroll (1984) came up with four ways that congregations groups organized its relationship toward the outside community—ranging from an “activist” orientation in which congregation groups actively addressed social, economic, and political issues to bring about justice in the community; to the withdrawn “sanctuary” orientation in which members used the congregation as a retreat from the sinful world around them. From my own experience talking with congregation activists, I seemed to find three major categories for the way that church activity was organized: groups formulated and run by large staffs within “mega-churches,” fellowship groups that may or may not have an explicit purpose but whose main focus is building community and relationships among members, and deeply purpose-driven groups that

are sometimes explicitly political. To get a better feel for these categories, I've included a brief case study of one example of each category. Along with each "organizational model" I've included brief comments on their relationship to encouraging civic engagement and the transmitting civic resources.

Case Study 1: Professionalized Service Opportunities in a "Mega-Church." Wooddale Church is a large evangelical Protestant congregation in a well-to-do outer suburb of Minneapolis. "We have about 2800 official members," Becca Oehrig, the church's outreach ministry associate, told me, "but we'll typically get somewhere around 5500 in regular attendance at Sunday worship." I met with Becca on a chilly afternoon in late December to talk about the church's relationship with the community via their outreach and social service programs. "We need to go outside of the doors of the church," she explained, "and live out the values of the kingdom of God...It's quite rewarding to see people get excited about what God can do through them."

The highlight of Wooddale's community outreach programming is the "LOVE IN[DEED]" project. The project's motto is "just show up and serve," and that is precisely what the volunteers do. About every other month approximately 200 volunteers from the church show up at the church and choose from a list of different service opportunities on which to work for an afternoon. When the volunteers arrive they are greeted and sent to the church's gym, where each service opportunity has a table set up to explain their work and sign people up. There are typically about eight to ten different service projects, representing everything from feeding the poor at a soup kitchen to cleaning out litter and invasive plant species from public parks. After a brief gathering to "cast a vision" for the day and hold a short prayer, the volunteers travel by bus

to their respective service sites, spend the rest of the afternoon working, and then return to the church by bus and go home.

The greatest benefit from a program like this is the sheer number of people drawn into service, and, more importantly to Becca, drawn into thinking about community problems. “These projects will not solve society’s problems, but they do get people out of their bubbles and puts a name and a face on social strife....It gives people the opportunity to cross over to a different segment of society, even if just for a couple of hours, to get a different view of the world.” Wooddale, as a large church, has the resources to fund and organize such an event that would not be possible in a smaller church; quite simply, they can do more to help the community because they “have the structures and resources to connect volunteers” with community need.

But, as Becca was more than willing to discuss, there were a few drawbacks to the program as well. First among these is what she saw as a rather disappointing turnout. “Two hundred people is a lot of people to get out serving in the community, but it is still a very small percentage of the total members of the church,” she commented, and this was particularly disappointing because “there’s just so much need out there for volunteers.” When asked why the turnout was at such a low percentage, she cited a second problem that was related to the first. She mentioned that there was “a real lack of a sense of community as a whole in our church because it is so large. In smaller groups, if you participate, *there* is where you build true community with fellow members, but this takes the initiative of an individual to be a part of something beyond mass.” By her estimate, only about a quarter of Wooddale members got involved in any of the small groups or activities beyond the weekly worship service.

Large churches like Wooddale can face the problem of *anonymity*. Holly Nimchuk of New Hope Church, another “mega-church” about 10 miles from Wooddale, told me that “it is

simply harder in a large church to have a real close-knit group....We can offer more things because we have more resources, but sometimes you can feel lost in the crowd.” The LOVE IN[DEED] project, while it turns out a good number of people to get to work on serving the community, is not a program particularly well-suited to build solid community or strong and affective social ties among the church’s members. As Becca described it, “some reflection and discussion about the service they’re doing and maybe some political discussion occurs on the buses to and from the sites. We just learned this, that the buses are beneficial for building the community and reflecting on service, and we want to *encourage* these conversations.” But for the most part any “community” that is built is only temporary—at the end of the day the volunteers go home to their families, and may not work again with the other volunteers they met that day. A few friendships and more lasting relationships will undoubtedly form, but there is a limit to this when they are spending only about four hours of one afternoon together. It is challenging to form permanent or systematic social networks through programming like this—the function of a church as a communication and recruitment network breaks down when the networks are fragmented by anonymity.

Furthermore, few civic skills are learned when simply doing mundane tasks for an afternoon. A small percentage of those associated with the LOVE IN[DEED] project (about fifteen individuals, some of whom are paid staff) take on the responsibility for organizing the activities of the day. A small leadership team of about seven volunteers meets regularly to plan and coordinate the program. Each site (again about eight to ten of them) has a leader who coordinates the transportation and scheduling. But the rest is handled by the church’s outreach ministry staff, and a vast majority of the volunteers have only the very limited commitment of “showing up and serving” for the afternoon. Putnam writes—lamenting the rise of national

membership organizations in which the members' commitment is, at best, reading an occasional newsletter and sending in a check for dues—that “what really matters from the point of view of social capital and civic engagement is not merely nominal membership, but active and involved membership” (2000, 58). In the absence of a professional staff to take on tasks like budgeting, organizing, planning, and carrying out programs like a volunteer service day, individual members of the church volunteer to take on responsibility for such tasks. The professional staff of a large church, while it may be more efficient, takes away these meaningful opportunities for volunteer members to practice civic skills and experience situations of democratic decision making. A more actively involved commitment than cleaning up a park for an afternoon is needed to truly build the civic skills that encourage activity.

And while the LOVE IN[DEED] volunteers are taken “out of their bubbles” for the day, there is no systematic mechanism in the program for deeper reflection or discussion of what their religious values have to say about things like poverty or the environment. Thus, very few psychological resources are transmitted when religious values are not connected with these community realities. “We would like to do more of this,” Becca said. In sum, volunteer opportunities within the hierarchy of a large and professionally staffed church oftentimes offer only a limited and temporary commitment and thus make only shallow headway into the development of the civic resources that church involvement has the potential to do.

Case Study 2: Fellowship- or Membership-Based Group. St. Mary's Orthodox Church in Cambridge, MA is quite different from Wooddale. For one thing, it is much smaller, counting about 300 individuals as members. But more importantly, the atmosphere and organizational culture of the congregation is largely different. First, the professional staff that coordinates

community outreach and other programs at Wooddale is replaced entirely by volunteers—groups are formed and events get planned wholly by the volition and will of the members of the congregation. “What I don’t want to happen is an overadministration of activity in the parish because that seems artificial,” says the parish’s pastor, Father Anthony Hughes. “It is much more meaningful when it arises on its own, more warm rather than cold, coming out of the heart. You don’t need structure to do service, you need it to arise on its own.”

Second, there is a much stronger sense of community and fellowship among all of the members of the church. Father Hughes explains:

The nature of this parish is that people want to be in fellowship with others, and so they seek out a group they can join; we don’t even have to have an active recruitment process....This parish just has a reputation of a warm community, intimacy, and hospitality in this parish. It draws people to us who want to be connected in fellowship.

The kinds of groups and purposes for which they form are thus distinct from those at a “Mega-Church.” Groups are started and run from the bottom-up, with volunteers at the helm. The church has a very small staff that provides little to no support or guidance to the groups beyond providing a space and a context in which the groups meet.

One such group is the church’s chapter of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America (“Antiochian Women”). Antiochian Women is a membership organization of Orthodox women with presence in the United States and Canada, affiliated with the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America. Each Antiochian Orthodox church has a local chapter (with a range of sizes from a handful of women in smaller Orthodox churches to up to 50 in larger ones), six regional councils across North America, and a National Board. I spoke with Marilyn Robbat, an elderly member of the congregation who is active in Antiochian Women. Active in her local chapter, she currently serves as a delegate to the regional organization, where

she attends quarterly meetings to vote on how to allocate money and other resources on the regional level, plan activities and events for the regional organization, and more.

The local chapter meetings get members just as involved in organizational processes and democratic decision-making as Marilyn is at the regional organization. “We usually open our meetings with the Antiochian Women’s Prayer,” she tells me, “then we go over the minutes from the last meeting, get an update on the treasury account, and then get to the meeting’s agenda. Usually we discuss and plan the events that are coming up, how to prepare, how to spend money for the charitable events. And then we distribute tasks among the members for the upcoming events.” The group is even organized democratically, with a president elected for a term of two years, and elected officers such as a treasurer and a secretary. As such, it does a good job of giving volunteers opportunities to practice civic skills.

But there is something quite different about this group. Antiochian women is what I call a “fellowship-” or “membership-based” group which either has no explicit stated purpose, or a stated purpose that is vague or broad enough to prevent it from dominating the culture and activity of the group. The group’s mission statement, listed on the national organization’s website, shares that “its purpose is to develop a spirit of Christian leadership, awareness, and commitment; to foster a genuine expression of love and service through works of charity; and to instill a sense of fellowship and a deeper understanding of the heritage and traditions of the Orthodox Church.” I asked Marilyn if any of the stated purposes were more important or more emphasized than the others. “All of the listed purposes are important,” she responded, “and they all mix together: charity, fellowship, *and* learning more about our faith. They are all important parts of the organization. The statement does a very good job of describing what the Antiochian Women are about.”

The group does engage in a considerable amount of charity work (helping at a battered women's shelter, for example) and fundraising for church activities (conducting an Easter bake sale to raise funds, for example). But these activities merely capture what the group *does*; they are the primary purpose and central theme for the group. It becomes clear when digging deeper into conversation with Marilyn that the primary function of the local chapters of Antiochian Women is to do what Father Hughes suggested, serve as a group where church members can find an outlet for their desire for fellowship and sense of belonging. As she commented, "we often do fun and interesting events for the women in the club, as part of the way we entice people to join the organization. For example, we always go out to dinner at Christmas time, we hold a summer book club, and other things like that. It's a great source of fellowship for the women." In short, the key feature of this "Christian service club" is not the *service* but the *club*.

This is by no means a frivolous function. Wilson, in fact, writes that the desire for fellowship is one of the more common incentives underlying the reasons why people join and participate in voluntary associations. He calls this incentive the "solidary incentive," the intangible rewards that are created by the act of associating with others in a group. "They involve the fun and conviviality of coming together, the sense of group membership or belonging, and such collective status or esteem as the group as a whole may enjoy." Solidary incentives are distinct from material incentives (tangible rewards such as money or access to exclusive services) and purposive incentives (the "intangible rewards that derive from the sense of satisfaction of having contributed to the attainment of a worthwhile cause") (Wilson 1995, 33-34). One advantage of groups formed around solidary incentives is that the tight-knit relationships among members in such groups are a great foundation for strong social networks that encourage communication and recruitment to other forms of activity.

But the disadvantage of such groups also stems from the need to rely on these close relationships. As Wilson describes, “the organizational effect of solidary incentives can never be as precise as the effect of” other incentives. People in the organization are more focused on the friendships built and the social nature of the group, and not as focused on achieving purposive aims such as working for social justice in the name of Christ or working to stop the legalization of a state-run lottery. The purposes of the group “must not be taken too seriously; otherwise, they would get in the way of the fun” (Wilson 1995, 40-43). In such an environment there is little opportunity for connecting religious values with community issues, and little development of attitudes of civic duty and responsibility. Whereas such groups are strong on promoting social networks, they are weak on promoting civically useful psychological resources.³

Close-knit social groups, in fact, have the potential to be detrimental to overall activity. As March and Olsen write, “[Too] strong identification with a specific organization, institution, or role can threaten the coherence of the larger system....[It may be] impossible to create common identities” with the community as a whole if an individual is too busy building an exclusive identity with a particular group (2005, 11). It may be possible that such groups become a *replacement* for participation in the community outside of the group—individuals may exclusively participate in such groups and therefore withdraw from community activity on the whole. Campbell (2004) found that fundamentalist Protestants, with a deep commitment to their churches and fellow members, participated a lot, but gave all of their time to their churches and

³ The Antiochian Women’s group fits one more key component of Wilson’s “solidary” groups. Such groups, he writes, tend to avoid all controversial issues, above all political issues, that may divide the membership and lessen the benefits of “conviviality.” “The purposes selected,” Wilson writes, “tend to be related to some *cause* (the distribution of benefactions to deserving persons) rather than to some *issue* (the conflict of ends). ‘Politics’ must be avoided assiduously” (1995, 43). Marilyn echoed these words quite closely: “We don’t discuss political issues within the church environment, I feel it would be appropriate, and people would take it as too controversial.... This environment is sacred and it’s not a place where I would involve that kind of ‘worldly’ thing in.”

neglected spending any time in activity outside of the church walls. It seemed that Marilyn may have been facing a similar effect.

I'm very involved with the church and don't have a lot of time to participate outside of the church much at all. I feel like I'm here 24/7, like my whole life revolves around my church. I suppose I have not come out of this box very much, come out to go into the political arena or other things.

In sum, the Antiochian Women's group has at best mixed effects of encouraging its members to be civically engaged in the communities outside of the church. On the one hand, the democratically organized meetings of the group provide opportunities to practice democratic decision-making and the tight-knit community provides access to a solid and well functioning social network. On the other hand, that tight-knit network may become too tight, encouraging members to spend their free time exclusively with the group and thus withdrawing from participation in the wider community. In such close-knit fellowship groups, it is difficult to tell which effects dominate more.

Case Study 3: The Politicized Congregational Group. Sitting in the reception area of Old South Church, waiting to meet with Associate Pastor Quinn Caldwell, a quick look around reveals the particular flavor of community connections this church is interested in. Behind me was a series of paintings and captions celebrating women who had achieved milestones in breaking the gender barrier, including Phyllis Wheatley, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Antoinette Brown Blackwell, the first woman to be ordained in the United Church of Christ, Old South's denomination. To my right was a bulletin board with a number of advertisements for upcoming events with some political implications: a church rally for climate change in which they would ring the bell 350 times; an AIDS walk through the streets of Boston to raise awareness of the devastating issue. Outside the front door was a big sign inviting anyone and everyone to watch a live screening of Barack Obama's Presidential Inauguration, with the slogan "Let's watch history

together.” Before Quinn even arrived I knew I was in for an exciting conversation about the relationship between religion and civic engagement.

Founded in 1699, Old South Church, as Quinn explained to me, had a long history of active engagement with community and political matters.

The church was founded in a battle of inclusion, as we were criticized very early in our history for baptizing African Americans in a time when civil rights wasn't even on the map yet. We are still fighting that battle of inclusiveness today as we work to support the rights of GLBT individuals. We've been very politically active since our founding. We believe that we have to be Christians in the public square if we're going to be Christians at all. We celebrate the separation of church and state but believe it's mainly there to protect the church from the state, not the other way around....This is a congregation that is deeply engaged in the world and are hungry for theological reflection about their public life. I try not to be shy about addressing political issues from the pulpit. The congregation wouldn't have it otherwise.

One way Old South manifests its desire to be active in public life is through its membership in the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, a coalition of area churches and synagogues committed to grassroots campaign and political work to advance a progressive agenda. The organization draws delegates from 20 to 30 congregations in the area to its meetings to work out plans for political action, and then these delegates return to their churches to mobilize their fellow members in political activity. One campaign that I witnessed and was able to get involved in during my time researching was GBIO's work to defeat Question 1, a Massachusetts state ballot initiative to eliminate the state income tax and its \$12 billion revenue stream. The congregations of GBIO saw this as a moral issue, threatening the religious obligations they had to serve the poor and help the neediest. As Quinn explained,

One of the reasons the income tax issue was taken up so strongly is that in the Bible we are told we have an obligation to serve the poor and those in need; the programs that would be cut would be those serving people in need. One thing in particular that was influential in our congregation is a focus in Protestantism on the importance of education. We didn't want taxes being cut that would lead to less funding for education. The poor are especially dear to God. And so we saw this as a theological issue first and then a political one.

One member of Old South, Alliya Grouppe chaired the whole “vote no on Question 1” campaign for GBIO, but there were plenty of opportunities for other volunteers from their church (as well

as the other GBIO member congregations) to get involved deeply in political activity. Some were invited to work on the GBIO leadership team, some were leaders in recruiting members from the Old South congregation, some were out on the street talking to people about the issue, some were canvassing at local cultural events, some participated in phone banking, some issue forums and rallies about the issue at the church. In short, this is an ultimate example of an organization that spreads civic skills widely through congregation activity and utilizes those social networks heavily to achieve political mobilization.⁴

This intense level of political activity is not typical in American congregations, but many congregations do participate in some political activities with notable frequency. As Beyerlein and Chaves report, in a sample they drew from 1236 American congregations, an entire 41 percent reported engaging in overtly political activities (encouraging congregation members to participate in politics, distributing voter guides, had a candidate for office visit and speak at the congregation, etc.) within the last year (2003, 235). The authors conclude that “although in absolute terms congregations’ levels of political activism seem low, relative to other nonpolitical organizations they engage in politics in substantial numbers” (2003, 242).

There are some drawbacks to this model, however. In some cases, GBIO congregations can be somewhat insular in their views, insisting upon like-mindedness on public policy issues instead of encouraging healthy democratic deliberation, discussion, and debate. The congregations that become members of GBIO are very homogeneous in political views in that they are nearly universally progressive. I asked each of the congregations to give me a guess as to the political leanings of their congregation: did a majority vote for McCain or Obama in the recent 2008 election? All of the congregations that were GBIO members responded that their

⁴ See Wald and Calhoun-Brown (2007, 137-139) for more on “faith-based organizing” networks such as GBIO and IAF.

congregations were strongly for Obama, with some having overwhelming majorities. “Probably less than 0.1% of our congregation voted for McCain,” said Quinn, “we were really supportive of Obama.” Faith Perry of Church of the Covenant, also a GBIO member church, told me they had “very few Republican voters” in the congregation. “I can probably count them on one hand,” she added, “We are not as welcoming to Republicans as we ought to be.” Lisa Price of Hope Church in Roslindale, MA, another GBIO member, commented that she found her church’s engagement in the community to be natural, because it was in her church where she found “a ready-made community of like interests, like values, and like desires to go do something about it.” When asked to describe the political leanings in her church she responded that Hope Church was “very strongly for Obama, we’re a very progressive church. People who’d vote for McCain would not survive here.”

For a further example of this, we turn to Greider, who writes about a meeting of GBIO’s mother organization, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), in Texas. IAF had drawn together leaders from congregations and other civic organizations from across the state to discuss and develop a “vision paper” on the state’s public education system. Greider writes:

The only discordant note was quickly smothered by [lead Texas organizer Ernie] Cortes. A priest rose to speak in behalf of the “school voucher issue”—a means of providing public financing for struggling parochial schools—and one mother seconded the plea. The public schools are hopeless, she said, and parents need help getting their kids out of them. Cortes responded with a soliloquy on Thomas Jefferson and the need for a unifying “common culture” in America—a diversion that seemed to close the subject.

Outside in the lobby later, Cortes bluntly warned the priest to back off, lest he prove an argument that might break up the multid denominational coalition. “I told the monsignor it was not in his interest to push the voucher issue,” Cortes said, “because we would have to fight him on it. The first thing we have to do is demonstrate our commitment to the common school, to preserve the common culture, or we’re going to wind up with a fractured, two-tiered country and that won’t be good for any of us.” The “voucher issues” was not mentioned again (1992, 231-232).

GBIO’s active commitment to working publicly on a progressive agenda of social justice means that consideration of alternate views could serve as a distraction from their work. The fact that the organization is a coalition of diverse (albeit all progressive) viewpoints and backgrounds

means that any dissonance could break the group apart—emphasis is instead placed on what is agreed upon. This isn't a lively exchange of ideas on public policy, but a grassroots network of people who have the same ideas working to see them realized in action.

With this in mind, it is clear that GBIO in particular, and even deep church involvement with politics in general, is not for everybody. Jane Metcalf of the Church of the Redeemer explained to me that her congregation was considering joining GBIO, “but we just couldn't get involved.” She told me that they were “trying to get it going, trying to find common ground, but we just couldn't. This is an older, more conservative church, and the people aren't as interested in being politically active. That's just the culture and the values of the parishioners, and we have to meet what is comfortable for them.”

But even with many congregations dissenting, those that do engage in faith-based organizing around political issues serve as incredible mechanisms for the development of civic skills, the connection between religious and political or civic values, and the utilization of recruitment networks to get people involved. Quinn even tried to recruit *me*. As I was leaving he handed me a flyer with a picture of now President Barack Obama on it: “Come join us for our live screening of the Inauguration if you'd like.”

V. Concluding Matter: Some Future Concerns

We have seen that in a number of different ways, religion and religious congregations can serve as rich resources to encourage civic engagement. Never all at the same time in one church, but in the aggregate they provide American citizens opportunities for the development of civic skills, a social and organizational infrastructure that facilitates political and community action, and the psychological resources of attitudes and values that bring one's mind and heart out into

community concerns. Without a doubt, as Weithman writes, American religion plays a key role in affecting the “formation of citizens” (2002, 14).

However, as we hear that American religion is changing rapidly—that it is on the decline (Putnam 2000), that a culture war is emerging between conservative and liberal denominations (Hunter 1991), that what once served as a strong guide for morals is now being watered-down by American popular culture (Wolfe 2003), and that what once was a religious climate based in community and fellowship is now turning into something that is *individualized* or *privatized* with “me” at the center (Wuthnow 2006)—we have to pay attention to how these changes can dilute the strength of religion as a civic resource. As people get less involved in their congregations and attend worship services less, less people will be exposed to opportunities to benefit from a congregation’s civic resources. As a rift develops between conservative and liberal congregations, opportunities for a common culture of civic duty and responsibility diminish. When religious values become less demanding of their believers, “you end up with a Gospel that endeavors to meet your needs without challenging your priorities” (Mahler 2005), and a broken system whereby one can learn civic values and attitudes. And when religious beliefs become more about “me” than about “us,” religion will tend to focus on the spiritual and the personal with a neglect of the communal and the collective. If American religion continues to transform in these ways, we could be looking at the development of very different relationship between religion and civic engagement in the course of my lifetime.

APPENDIX A: Methodology for Empirical Analysis

Data. Data has been collected from the DDB Needham Life Style Surveys archive, containing annual survey evidence dating from 1975-1998 on individuals' personal beliefs, political attitudes, civic and social activities, and demographic characteristics. With an annual sample of between 3,500 and 4,000, the compiled archive contains nearly 90,000 unique observations. The particular variables studied from this archive are listed below along with the empirical model.

There are three advantages to using data from the DDB Needham survey that are not available when using other data sets. The first is the rather large sample size available. Hopefully with such a large sample the results of our analysis will be more accurate. The second advantage is that the survey represents a pooled cross-section of data—data collected from different participants over the course of many years. This allows us to eliminate some potential sources of error, for example error due to the fact that voter turnout was particularly low or high in a particular year the survey was taken. Though conceivable, I see no reason why the relationship between religion and politics would change over the course of these 25 years. Finally, the survey allows us to systematically control for a number of social and demographic factors that are not available with other data sets, factors such as marital status and whether or not there are children at home, that nonetheless have some clear and significant relationship with political participation levels. Again, the hope is that after controlling for these factors, our estimate will be more accurate.

Empirical Model. It is my hypothesis that an individual's chosen level of political participation is a function of the individual's level of religious involvement, as well as a number of additional determining factors such as the individual's age, level of education, and income.

That is, with all other factors controlled, we have supposed that a person who is more involved religiously will be more involved in political activities than a person who is not active religiously. Within the limitations of the available data, we can come to predict the *ceteris paribus* degree to which religious commitment encourages political participation, with the following equation:

$$\text{CIVICENG} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{AGE} + \beta_2 \text{AGE}^2 + \beta_3 \text{EDUC} + \beta_4 \text{INC} + \beta_5 \text{RACE} + \beta_6 \text{SEX} \\ + \beta_7 \text{EMPL} + \beta_8 \text{CHLD} + \beta_9 \text{MAST} + \beta_{10} \text{CHATTD} + \beta_{11} \text{REL} + \epsilon$$

The variables in this equation can be defined as follows:

- CIVICENG in this equation is merely a place holder for the dependent variable in the 19 different equations run to test my hypothesis. To measure how religious participation affects a broad array of civic, political, and social activities, I ran the regression using a number of different dependent variables, including the frequency with which the respondent contacted a public official in the last year, whether or not the respondent donated blood in the last year, how often the respondent read the news section of the daily newspaper, whether or not the individual had played a team sport in the last year, as well as many more. The complete list of dependent variables is shown in Table 2;
- AGE and AGE² together represent the effect of the individual's age. This variable, it has been shown, has a quadratic relationship with civic engagement. Civic engagement tends to increase as an individual grows from their teen years to middle age, but at around 50 years of age there is a peak and the amount of civic engagement tends to decline again (Putnam 2000, 249). This trend was played out in my data analysis, and the joint effect of these variables together were statistically significant under F-tests;
- EDUC represents the individual's level of education attained, included because the highly educated tend to participate more than those who are not. Because of the way that the data was presented in the database, this variable was broken down into a series of binary or "dummy" variables, with the base value being a grammar school education (no high school classes completed). The variable listed in Table 2 is the dummy variable for graduating college, and thus represents the effect of gaining a college degree when compared to having no high school education at all. As predicted, for nearly every dependent variable, the more education one obtained, the more likely one was to participate in the community;
- INC represents the individual's income level, included because those with higher income tend to participate more;

- RACE represents the individuals race (sometimes white or black, sometimes white, black, or Hispanic), included because minorities, holding other factors constant tend to participate at different levels depending on the activity (usually lower) than Caucasians;
- SEX represents the individual's sex, included because studies have shown that females often participate more than males (though this trend is declining);
- EMPL represents the individual's employment status (full-time, part-time, or unemployed), included as a proxy for the individual's available free time, for those with more free time tend to spend more time participating than those who are too busy otherwise;
- CHLD represents whether or not the individual has children at home, included because those with children participate at different levels (sometimes more because they are connected to activities through their kids, and sometimes less because they have less time to participate if they are caring for their kids) than those without children;
- MAST represents the individual's marital status; included because those that are married tend to be more grounded in their communities and, building more extensive social networks and social trust in their communities, tend to participate more because of it;
- CHATTD represents whether or not the individual regularly attends church, defined as attending a religious service more than twice per month over the course of the year (at least 25 services attended over the course of the year);
- and RELG represents individual's subjective measure of their own religiosity—the degree to which they believe that religion is an important part of their life.

All of the predicted effects of the independent variables were played out in the regression analysis, including the ambiguous (and thus never consistent) effects of marital and parental status. Clearly the parameters β_{10} and β_{11} are what we are looking for; they measure the *ceteris paribus* effect of an individual's religiosity on their level of civic involvement. These betas, after being standardized, are the values listed in Table 2. An error term ϵ is included to represent factors that have been unaccounted for within the model. Running a multiple variable OLS analysis on my data gave me a *ceteris paribus* estimate of the desired parameters. In a few noted cases, probit analysis was run because the dependent variables were in binary (yes/no) form. I

have included for purposes of comparison an education variable measuring the effect of a college education on participation. The results are listed in Table 2.

APPENDIX B: Information on Interview Subjects and My Questionnaire

Table 3 presents summary information about my 25 interview subjects and the congregations they belong to. The table contains both general information about the congregations, as well as information about whether or not there is racial diversity in the congregation, the subject's guess at the congregation population's political views, the position of the interview subject in the congregation, and whether or not they were serving as volunteers.

Table 3: Summary Information on Interview Subjects

| Name | Church | Denomination | Location | Size | Racial Diversity | Cong Pol Views | Position | Vol? |
|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--|-------------|
| Diane Vallerio | St. Ignatius of Loyola | Catholic | Chestnut Hill, MA | 1800 | No | 70% Dem | Director, Outreach Ministries | No |
| Quinn Caldwell | Old South Church | UCC | Boston, MA | 450 | Yes | 99% Dem | Asst. Pastor | No |
| Jason Lydon | Community Church of Boston | Unitarian Universalist | Boston, MA | 78 | No | 99% Dem | Lead Pastor | No |
| Lori Laudner | Beth El Temple | Reformed Jewish | Belmont, MA | 1100 | No | Majority Dem | Co-Chair Social Action Committee | Yes |
| Terry Burke | First Church, Jamaica Plain | Unitarian Universalist | Jamaica Plain, MA | 110 | Yes | 99% Dem | Pastor, Member of Soc. Justice Cmte | No |
| Jane Metcalf | Church of the Redeemer | Episcopalian | Chestnut Hill, MA | 300-400 | No | Majority Rep | President, Church Service League | Yes |
| Austin Calhoun | Highrock Church | Evangelical Protestant | Allston, MA | 100 | Yes | Majority Dem | “Make-A-Difference” Ministry Director | No |
| Bill Kelly | Holy Name Parish | Catholic | West Roxbury, MA | 1400 | Yes | 70% Dem | Member, Society of St. Vincent de Paul | Yes |
| Dan Smith | First Church, Cambridge | UCC | Cambridge MA | 100 | Yes | 99% Dem | Lead Pastor | No |
| Susan Stewart | Calvary Church | United Methodist | Arlington, MA | 200 | No | Majority Dem | Coordinator, Missions & Social Action Cmte | No |
| Christine Elliot | Calvary Church | United Methodist | Arlington, MA | 200 | No | Majority Dem | Lead Pastor | No |
| Evelyn Frankford | Temple Beth Zion | Post-Denominational Jewish | Brookline, MA | 200 | No | 95% Dem | Chair of Tikkun Olam Cmte | Yes |
| Burns Stanfield | Fourth Presbyterian Church | Presbyterian | South Boston, MA | 140 | Yes | Majority Dem | Lead Pastor | No |
| Anthony Hughes | St. Mary’s Orthodox | Antiochian Orthodox | Cambridge MA | 300 | Yes | 60% Dem | Lead Pastor | No |
| Marilyn Robbat | St. Mary’s Orthodox | Antiochian Orthodox | Cambridge MA | 300 | Yes | 60% Dem | Church Secretary, Women’s Group | No |

| Name | Church | Denomination | Location | Size | Racial Diversity | Cong Pol Views | Position | Vol |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--|------------|
| Faith Perry | Church of the Covenant | UCC / Presbyterian | Back Bay, Boston, MA | 150 | No | 99% Dem | Coordinator, Outreach and Charity Programs | Yes |
| Lisa Price | Hope Church | UCC | Boston, MA | 120 | Yes | 99% Dem | Coordinator, Social Justice Ministry Cmte | Yes |
| Bob McKenney | Park Street Church | CCCC | Boston, MA | 1500 | Yes | Majority Dem | Executive Minister | No |
| Lynette Polatin | Temple Emmanuel | Conservative Jewish | Newton Centre, MA | 300 | No | Majority Dem | Volunteer Coordinator | Yes |
| Holly Nimchuk | New Hope Church | Evangelical Free | New Hope, MN | 3000 | No | Majority Rep | Director of Hopebridge Community Outreach Center | No |
| Bunny Arseneau | St. Raphael's Parish | Catholic | Crystal, MN | 2000 | Yes | 75% Rep | Director, Social Needs Programs | Yes |
| Becca Oehrig | Wooddale Church | Baptist General Conference | Eden Prairie, MN | 2800 | No | 80% Rep | Outreach Ministry Coordinator | No |
| Anne Saevig | St. Joseph's Parish | Catholic | New Hope, MN | 1500 | No | In the Middle | Adult Ministries & Programming Coordinator | No |
| Jason Wittak | St. Joseph's Parish | Catholic | New Hope, MN | 1500 | No | In the Middle | Director of Social Justice Programs | No |
| Bradd Lasch | Beautiful Savior | Missouri Synod Lutheran | Plymouth, MN | 2010 | No | Majority Rep | Director of Christian Outreach | No |

Here is the list of questions I asked of each respondent.

1. What is your role, or what is your relationship to [institution]? What do you do here?
2. Tell me a little bit about [institution]
 - a. What is the affiliation of this congregation?
 - b. How many members does this congregation have?
 - c. Do most people live nearby or do most have to travel to get here?
 - d. Is there a lot of racial and ethnic diversity, or are most people from pretty much the same background?
 - e. Is there a lot of economic diversity, or are most at about the same level?
 - f. Is there a diversity of political views within the congregation, or would you say most members tend to have the same political views?
 - g. If you had to guess, how would you think most people in the congregation voted in the recent presidential election? [Give options]
 - h. Is there a volunteer or social ministry requirement for young people in the congregation?
3. Tell me a little bit about yourself:
 - a. How long have you been a member here?
 - b. Were you always a member of this kind of religious institution, [denomination]?
 - c. About how often do you pray?
 - d. Are you a paid employee of [institution]?
4. How did you get involved with the social action arm of [institution]? How did you find out about it? Why did you decide to join it? How did you come to be more active in it?
5. Can you tell me about the last project you got involved in?
 - a. What did you do personally, what kind of activity?
 - b. Is this typical of the types of project you usually engage in?
 - c. Did the project involve volunteers from the congregation?
 - d. How did you recruit them, find them, get them involved?
 - e. What kinds of activities were they involved in, what did they do?
 - f. Were most of the volunteers “regulars” or people who frequently get involved with this kind of thing at your institution, or were many of them new volunteers?
 - g. Were there any opportunities for the volunteers to have leadership in this project?
 - h. Was there any time spent in prayer or reflection about the activity? How much? What was it like, what sorts of things did you or others bring up in this time?

6. There's lots of ways to help people or get involved in the community, so why choose this way to get involved?
 - a. Is there anything particularly XXXX about the way that your congregation does social action?
 - b. Why do you, personally, find these projects important to engage in?
7. Do you think you would have gotten involved in _____ if you didn't get involved in it through your congregation? What about the volunteers that you've worked with, do you think most of them would have gotten involved in something like this if they weren't a part of this congregation?
8. Is one of the purposes of social action at this religious institution to share the faith tradition, beliefs, and values of the XXXXX church?
 - a. Do you talk about the beliefs, values, and faith of the XXXX church when you are engaging in service?
 - b. Do you feel comfortable using language from your scripture or other religious language when engaging in service?
 - c. Do you ever witness volunteers or others you are working with discussing their faith as they carry out their work?
9. What has been most rewarding in your work with [.....] so far? What do you like best about it?
10. What is the hardest part about your work? What are the biggest frustrations about doing what you do? Why is this such a problem?
11. How do you organize the social action arm at your institution? Is it primarily run by yourself and your team, or is there a whole lot of planning and organizing work done by volunteers and other members of your congregation?
12. How do you find the projects that your congregation engages in? Do you create them yourself or find them through some other network or organization?
13. Are there any issues or activities that your organization does *not* get involved in because it would be considered "controversial" in the congregation?
 - a. How does the congregation deal with this? How are differences of opinion dealt with in this congregation?
14. What about the people you work with at [.....], do you like working with them? Have you made any friends through the organization?

I'd like to find out a little bit more about you personally, about your background and how you got to where you are today

15. Did you receive any kind of special education or training to do what you do?

- a. What skills or talents did you bring with you when you started that helped you learn to be successful in this work right away?
 - b. Have you learned anything on the job that has helped you do a better job?
16. Are you personally active in other community projects or political activity outside of your work with [.....]? What kinds of things do you get involved with?
17. What's the last grade of school you completed?
- a. What did you study [what was your favorite subject in high school?]
 - b. Were you always interested in that?
 - c. Why/How did you come to be interested in it?
 - d. How is this related to your work with [...], how has this helped with your work?
 - e. How is this related to the activity that you get involved with outside of [.....]?
18. What do you think is the biggest problem facing our country right now? What do you think we need to do about it? Do you see your work with [...] as a part of a solution to this problem?
19. What has changed most about our country since the time when you were growing up?
20. [Skip maybe] A lot of times people see America as a very individualistic country, people doing their own thing a lot, and we certainly disagree about a lot of things, sometime disagree quite deeply. What do you think holds us together despite all this?
21. How do you personally understand something like “social justice”?
- a. When and how did you first come to think about social justice issues, things like helping the poor?
22. Do you think people who are not religious can still be good people? Why or why not?

Three more questions about your congregation and then we are finished.

23. Do you feel like your church has a real sense of community? Do you often get requests from your fellow congregation members to get involved in other community or political projects that they are leading or involved in? Have you made a lot of friends from church?
24. Does the pastor/leader of [...] discuss political issues when he/she addresses the congregation? What do you, personally, think of this?
- a. Does your leader ever encourage people to get involved in their communities, get involved in politics, go to the polls, vote for a particular candidate, or contribute to a particular cause?

25. Do you ever discuss political issues with people you meet at [...]? Do you discuss them while at church or mostly just outside of church? Do you discuss them while you are engaged in the community projects you are involved in?
26. Do I have your permission to quote you in my final paper, and if I do to use your name when quoting? If I do, I will be sure to check in with you before I publish anything to ensure you approve the accuracy of what you said.

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